JAMES WOLCOTT SMACKS KATHRYN HARRISON IN THE KISSER

THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 31, 1997 • $2.95

The GOP's Lost Generation—Stephen Glass • Zoning Cyberporn—Jeffrey Rosen

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Jude Wanniski's ideas
It's a little late for that.

by Jonathan Chait

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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CORRESPONDENCE

Political science

To the editors:

Your unprofessional, inaccurate and irresponsible Notebook item (February 17) on the German government's discrimination against the Church of Scientology is almost identical to the propaganda routinely issued by German politicians. Incredibly, TNR poo-poos the fact that the Christian Democrats have banned all members of the Church of Scientology, a repressive position adopted by all major political parties in Germany. Isn't free access to the political process what a democracy is all about? Apparently your writer doesn't think so. Scientologists in Germany are routinely fired from their jobs, slandered in the press, targeted by discriminatory decrees and subjected to debilitating business boycotts—for what they believe. It is their experiences that lay at the heart of growing world concern over Germany's willingness to suppress an entire class of people guilty of no wrong. In fact, the very real human rights abuses against Scientologists in Germany have drawn the attention of the Helsinki Commission, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and the U.S. State Department.

ALEXANDER R. JONES
Office of Public Affairs
Founding Church of Scientology
Washington, D.C.

Upside down

To the editors:

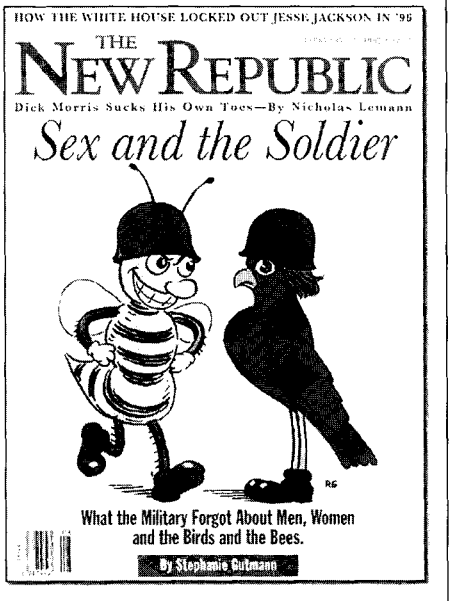
In his otherwise interesting discussion of the year's budget maneuvers ("Lovey-Dovey," March 3), Jonathan Chait mistakenly characterizes capital gains tax relief as a "subsidy" that would have "government, rather than markets, dictate investments." This analysis is upside down. Between capital gains taxes, corporate income taxes, personal income taxes and estate taxes, the current tax code imposes as many as four layers of tax on income that is saved and invested. Income that is consumed, by contrast, is taxed only once. A neutral tax code, one in which resources are allocated on the basis of economic efficiency instead of tax considerations, requires equal treatment of savings and consumption. This is why all the major tax reform proposals eliminate the multiple taxation of the current code.

Leftists should support this policy, by the way, since every economic theory—including Marxism—recognizes that capital formation is the key to economic growth and rising wages. Given the evidence, one is tempted to conclude that supporters of multiple taxation are ideologues who, to block the rich from keeping more of their money, would sacrifice higher living standards for the less fortunate.

DANIEL J. MITCHELL
Washington, D.C.

Jonathan Chait replies:

Daniel Mitchell's example of a "neutral tax code" would tax personal income from labor but not from capital. That's hardly "equal treatment of savings and consumption." It's irrelevant anyway, because what we have now is an income tax. If you put your money in the bank, the


HOW THE WHITE HOUSE LOCKED OUT JESSE JACKSON IN '96
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Dick Morris Sucks His Own Toes—By Nicholas Lemann
Sex and the Soldier
What the Military Forgot About Men, Women and the Birds and the Bees.
By Stephanie Salmon

income you earn will be taxed normally. If you put it in the stock market, it will be taxed at a special, lower rate. This subsidy *stunts* capital formation by swelling the deficit and forcing the Treasury to soak up private investment.

Nice thought

To the editors:

In pointing out the difference in the evidence presented in the two O.J. Simpson trials ("Mr. Guilty Is Liable," February 24), TNR rejects the conclusion that "color is epistemology," and remarks "we believe that black jurors would have been as affected by the civil case as white jurors." Nice thought. But, as Michael Fleeman of the Associated Press reported, the lone black member of the jury in the civil case—a female alternate who heard the same evidence as the others but did not participate in deliberations—found Simpson's testimony to be "pretty credible." Moreover, she believed that the plaintiffs were "bullies," that police probably planted evidence and that the real killer was probably on the loose. I suggest you reconsider your optimism.

STEPHEN M. PARKER
New Brunswick, New Jersey

The literati

To the editors:

In its October 7, 1996, issue, TNR published "The Booby Trap," a lengthy book review that I might have found peculiar and extravagant even if I were not so unpleasantly the subject of it. The review of my book *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World* was written by Helen Vendler, poetry critic and Porter University Professor at Harvard, and it featured the kind of pedantry and sarcasm—some of it aimed at me, some at Columbia University—that Vendler, in the past, has rarely allowed into her published writings. The vehemence of the piece was puzzling. My book was a personal account of a year spent reading, a kind of reader's journal offered without official imprimatur or institutional ambition of any sort. What sent Vendler into such angry flights? What was at stake?

The issue, I'm afraid, was one of authority. Who will define and control literature in this country? Will it be the trained professionals practicing one orthodoxy or another in the universities, or the others, the many versions of what Dr. Johnson and Virginia Woolf called (without irony) the "common reader"—that all but vanished person who comes at books not to take possession but to seek pleasure and instruction?

Virginia Woolf believed herself part of a community of novelists, poets and critics who wrote for serious readers. But, since the 1920s, our literary culture has split apart, and an enormous proprietary bureaucracy devoted to literature has grown up in the universities—so enormous and pervasive that, despite a great deal of journalism on the subject in recent years, most educated Americans remain blind to its essential oddity. For those not blind, the bureaucracy appears to operate with astounding arrogance, establishing right and wrong ways to read and disestablishing, at times, certain books, the author as creator and the reader himself. Before reading Vendler's piece, I had never thought I would run afoul of this behemoth—and I certainly had never imagined that Vendler would step forward to represent it, since she is angrily at odds with many of its current tendencies. Obviously, I underestimated

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the irritation an outsider might cause.

Inadvertently, it seems, I have cast myself into the role of literary Protestant, guilty of the presumption of trying to put the "Western classics" directly into the hands of ordinary educated readers. In response, one of the priests of "literary studies" struck back.

Great Books chronicles the year (1991-92) I spent at Columbia University retaking, at the age of 48, the two famous required undergraduate core curriculum courses in Western classics, Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, the courses I had first taken thirty years before as a freshman. These courses are also part of the modern bureaucratic university, but they are as un-course-like as possible. Taught by men and women from many disciplines, and aimed at the cultivation of readerly virtues in beginning students, they escape the malaise of specialization and professionalism—that is one reason they cause such resentment in the academy.

For me, they offered a place to read seriously. The point, I thought, was to ignore the ideological fatuities of "the culture wars" and instead to imitate the rude initiatory rites undergone by freshmen and sophomores at Columbia—to jump in, and to see what I could find in the books and in myself. Along the way, I observed what students and teachers, faced with the "Western classics," actually sounded like. As an essayist and memoirist, I enjoyed one remarkable advantage over academics: I was not bound to observe the classroom distinction between, on the one hand, the notion that these classic texts are "implicated in the world" and have some effect on their readers and, on the other, the notion that they are "self-enclosed structures of words." I could report on the life in front of me, textual, physical, moral, in whatever form it took.

The book that resulted is a compound of criticism, observation and autobiographical reflection. How does Vendler deal with it? Rapping her knuckles on the lecture podium, she denounces again and again my departures from standard academic practice. I am hectored with doctrine, harassed with sour faculty-club witticisms. Every time I leave the classroom, and allow the books to flow into my life (and my life into the books), Vendler madly runs after me and pulls me back in again.

What an absurd fate! Venturing into the university, the general reader instantly gets ridiculed as a failed academic. I clearly stated in my introduction that Columbia was the setting, not the subject, of the book, yet Vendler treats me as a negligent spokesman for the university, berating me for not giving the history of Columbia's core curriculum courses (something many other writers have done) and for failing to account for the changes in the syllabus over the years (which would have required a separate volume on the evolution of taste). *Great Books* is a narrative for the general reader, shaped to produce a certain emotional effect—a book, not a textbook or a report to the academy. Has the great poetry critic read so little narrative prose that she is unacquainted with the commonplace strategy of selecting and adhering to a limited point of view?

Let us come to the main charge, an accusation that Columbia (and myself, helplessly reflecting Columbia's practice) cannot read literature. For the Literature Humanities course, Vendler protests, is heavy on "ideas" in the sense of ethical and moral sentiments—ideas which come at the expense of purely aesthetic experience. The shaping of the reading list forces students into banal ethical judgments "unclouded by literary or imaginative considerations."

Again and again, Vendler implies that it is a matter of unspeakable vulgarity to read for ethical and moral sentiment. But Vendler's contemptuous disapproval would seem strange to Plato and Dr. Johnson. It would also seem strange

continued on page 40

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FROM WASHINGTON

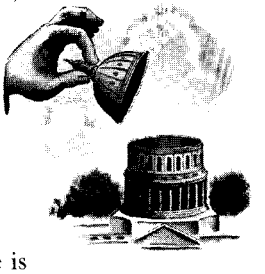
Judge dread

The Republicans are not happy. They suffer from feelings of loss and inadequacy. This confuses and frustrates them. After all, they fared pretty well in 1996; they kept the Hill and lost the White House in a race where one of the most agile campaigners of all time ran against one of the least agile. The national agenda is, more or less, their agenda. Their great nemesis Bill Clinton is, again, beset by scandal. And yet it's just no fun anymore. Things are not going the way they should. Trent Lott has caved to the Democrats, and now Fred Thompson's committee will be looking into Republican fund-raising improprieties as well as Democratic illegalities, which wasn't the idea at all. Nothing much else is happening. The revolution is in the doldrums. Nobody's got a plan; nobody's got a direction. God only knows where Newt is, probably locked in his office to work on his design for a perpetual motion machine.

It is precisely at moments like these that Republicans get the sort of brilliant ideas that have won them the sobriquet of The Stupid Party. Once again, they do not disappoint. On March 11, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay unveiled to *The Washington Times* the party's dazzling new scheme for getting the revolution back on track: congressional Republicans will begin attempting to impeach liberal federal judges. DeLay told the *Times* that "articles of impeachment are being written right now" against a Texas judge and that two other judges are being considered for impeachment. "As part of our conservative efforts against judicial activism, we are going after judges," DeLay said. "Congress has given up its responsibility in [overseeing] judges and their performance on the bench, and we intend to revive that and go after them in a big way."

DeLay's idea would be frightening even if it were only the expression of one man's fatheadedness, but it is not. The right has once again fingered judicial activism as the cause of its woes. The right-wing National Legal Foundation is calling for the impeachment of six out of the nine Supreme Court justices for failing to vote properly in support of Colorado's prohibition against anti-discrimination laws for homosexuals. Far-right writer Pat Buchanan last week denounced "the lawlessness of the federal courts" in "frustrating the will of a conservative majority." Mid-right writer William Kristol adopted much the same position, urging conservatives on March 12 to mobilize behind "the battle cry: 'No new liberal judges.' "

The cry is already in full bellow on the Hill. Senator Orrin Hatch, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, is presiding over a slowdown of confirmations that amounts almost to a stoppage. Under great pressure from younger and more perfervid senators, Hatch has said his committee will not confirm any nominees deemed to be excessively activist. On November 15, in an assertion of breathtaking sweep, Hatch declared: "a judicial activist is not qualified to sit on the federal bench."



What Hatch is saying here is that a liberal activist jurist—which Republicans vaguely and inconsistently define as one who believes in exercising a very broad and final authority over the law, to the point of overruling the legislative will of the people—is definitionally unfit to serve.

Hatch is backing up this extraordinary expansion of senatorial privilege with action, or rather inaction. His committee is sitting on twenty-six nominations that the White House has sent up since January. More than twenty of the nominations are actually renominations, people named but not confirmed in the last Congress; in some cases these nominations have been held up for more than two years. Hatch's position already stretches the limits of the doctrine of separation of powers. Now DeLay proposes to destroy this fundamental precept entirely. It is hard to imagine a surer scheme for producing a constitutional crisis than for the party that controls Congress to conduct a campaign of impeachment against judges whose views represent those of the other party.

This was never intended by the Framers, nor has it ever been attempted. The Constitution allows Congress to impeach, to convict and to remove from office a federal judge for "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors." It merely requires a simple majority in the House to impeach and a two-thirds majority in the Senate to convict on the impeachment. But it has always been understood that this power is to be used against serious, almost always criminal, malfeasance. In 221 years, only thirteen judges have been impeached. Only once—in the 1804 impeachment (but not conviction) of Supreme Court Associate Justice Samuel Chase—has this occurred because a judge rendered a politically incorrect judicial decision.

DeLay has no patience with Congress's silly old prudishness about abusing its power and corrupting the Constitution. He is explicitly calling for Congress to use the impeachment process against judges who are not accused of any criminal conduct, but who have simply made rulings that go against conservative philosophy or Republican interests. The judge in Texas that DeLay mentioned is a case in point. He is U.S. District Judge Fred Biery. His high crime? In January, he ruled that two Republican winners in the 1996 elections, candidates for county sheriff and county commissioner, could not be sworn in, because their elections had been illegally decided by 800 absentee votes cast by long-departed military personnel from Laughlin Air Force Base.

The two other judges under consideration for impeachment are Harold Baer Jr., a Clinton appointee to the U.S. District Court in New York, and Chief U.S. District Judge Thelton Henderson, in San Francisco. Their crimes? Baer threw out evidence and a confession in a drug case because he said the police had insufficient cause to search the defendant's car. (Under pressure from Clinton, he reversed himself.) Henderson blocked implementation of California's Proposition 209, a voter referendum to ban preferences by race and sex in state employment and in admissions to state colleges.

As these latter two cases indicate, conservatives do have a case against those judges who practice judicial activism as a means of fulfilling their own ideological fancies. As legislatures and popular votes have increasingly disfavored the left's positions, the left has at times used judges to achieve what could not be gained in a democratic fashion. But there are two remedies available for this: the Supreme Court, which may overrule these judges, and the electoral process, by which the citizens may reject a president whose judicial appointments annoy them. Congressional Democrats and Republicans have already corrupted the confirmation process, turning it into an endless round of Borking and counter-Borking. But the damage that has done to the rule of the Constitution is as nothing compared to what DeLay's bright idea would unleash.

MICHAEL KELLY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 31, 1997

OUT OF THE LOOPHOLE

Thompson defeats Lott! Since realizing that Republican Senator Fred Thompson intended to use his Governmental Affairs Committee to investigate a wide range of fund-raising abuses, including abuses by Republicans, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott has been trying to cut the Tennessean down to size. Last week, Lott got the Rules and Administration Committee to pass a resolution limiting Thompson's investigation to "illegal" activities. But a few disgruntled moderate Republicans and various noisy Democrats squawked, and the Majority Leader backed down. As the Senate prepared to authorize the committee's funding, Lott agreed to an amendment allowing an investigation into not merely "illegal" but also "improper" activities. On March 11, the Senate passed the measure 99 to 0. This means that Thompson's committee will be able to look not simply at which member of the Clinton administration made which phone call and accepted which check where, but also into "soft money," the canyon-sized loophole that explains why so much of the Clintonites' dubious behavior was entirely legal.

Like so many abuses, the soft money scandal sprung from good intentions, in this case an attempt at making fund-raising more democratic. In 1974, in the wake of Watergate, Congress amended the campaign laws to limit the amount individuals could give to candidates, political action committees (PACs) and political parties to $25,000 a year. But in 1979, the Federal Election Commission (FEC)—hoping to encourage party organization—ruled that individuals, corporations and unions could give unlimited sums to parties to promote voter registration and political education. In 1980, the parties used this loophole to raise $20 million in soft money. By 1988, the Bush and Dukakis campaigns had discovered they could use soft money for targeted voter registration and for "generic ads" that extolled their candidates. That year, they raised $50 million. But 1996 was the real watershed. Spurred by a Supreme Court ruling that parties could use soft money to finance issue advocacy directed at candidates as long as they didn't expressly say which candidates to vote for, the Democrats and Republicans together raised a staggering $263.5 million. The loophole had swallowed the law.

The GOP attracted the most wealthy donors, creating a group of "Season Ticket" holders—those donating at least $250,000—with special access to Republican lawmakers. But the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton administration also got heavily into the act. The White House appears to have devoted most of its fund-raising effort to soft money. When Al Gore phoned donors from the White House, he was soliciting soft money; the $50,000 given to Maggie Williams was soft money; and so were the millions—much of it from foreign sources—raised by John Huang and Johnny Chung.

What can be done about soft money? Abolish it. Require that contributions to political parties—for whatever purpose—be subject to the same limitations as contributions to candidates. Ban corporations and labor unions from contributing directly to parties. If businesses or labor unions want to organize PACs, where donors give voluntarily and are subject to individual spending limits, that's fine, but businesses shouldn't be able to use their profits, and unions their members' dues, to support candidates or parties.

Of course, abolishing soft money is no panacea. It won't eliminate political inequality—the AFL-CIO and the Chamber of Commerce will still be able to set up "independent" organizations and run ads on behalf of candidates—but it will at least create some distance between politicians and these large donors. It is this absence of distance, this presence of special access, measured in a White House coffee or a visit with the Speaker, that most clearly nourishes corruption and convinces ordinary Americans that the rich and powerful are more equal than the rest of us voters and that they have a large and secret say in who is elected and how they govern.

The McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill that Clinton trumpeted in his State of the Union would eliminate soft money and establish voluntary limits on campaign spending, but Republicans, who have raised about two-thirds of the soft money, are dead set against the bill. McCain-Feingold has only two Republican sponsors in the Senate, McCain and Thompson. Lott and the Republican leadership tried to restrict the scope of Thompson's committee precisely because they feared that nationally televised hearings into political corruption would build irresistible pressure for comprehensive campaign reform. Now, thanks to Lott's retreat, reform remains a possibility. Barely. •

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NOTEBOOK

OFFENSIVE, BY *GEORGE*: When her son Yigal murdered Yitzhak Rabin, Geula Amir begged the late prime minister's widow for forgiveness. Now, however, she has recanted in a bizarre conspiracy screed published in that well-known journal of international affairs: *George*. Incapable of dealing with the question of how she raised such a monster, Geula Amir chooses instead to blame Rabin's death on members of his own Labor Party, the Israeli secret service—anyone but her son. *George* presents these ravings as a legitimate, important viewpoint, which it is bravely risking controversy to present. (The only framing comes from a few lame sidebars by National Public Radio's usually reliable Jerusalem reporter, Linda Gradstein, on brief leave from her senses.) After his craven interviews with Louis Farrakhan and George Wallace, it seems John Kennedy Jr. has finally found, in Geula Amir, the ultimate combination of dumb and offensive, the *reductio ad absurdum* of its amoral view of politics as show business. Once again, the hunk flunks.

WATERGATE WATCH: On March 4, House Speaker Newt Gingrich called the White House's sordid fundraising practices "the most systematic large-scale effort to get around the law that I think we've seen, certainly since Watergate." Or at least since Filegate last July, about which Gingrich declared: "I believe in the long run this is going to be a bigger scandal than Watergate was." Soon after, Democrats dubbed Gingrich's own ethical woes the next Watergate. What is *not* worse than Watergate? In our perpetually scandalized America, it turns out, nothing.

"This is worse than Watergate."
—Senator Alfonse D'Amato on Whitewater, March 7, 1994.

"It was a calculated assault on the constitutional balance of power, far worse than Watergate's cover-up of a political burglary."
—Anthony Lewis on Iran-Contra, December 28, 1992.

"This is a far bigger cover-up than Watergate ever was."
—then-vice presidential candidate Al Gore on Iran-Contra, October 25, 1992.

"The coverup is worse than Watergate."
—Scott D. Wolfe, director of Citizens for Scientific Reality, on the government's refusal to disclose the truth about UFO visits to earth, January 1990.

"This is bigger than Watergate."
—Emmett J. Ashley Jr., Atlanta Zoo veterinarian, on deaths of zoo animals due to ill treatment, June 1984.

YOURS UNCORDIALLY: The letter that King Hussein of Jordan sent to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel is an extraordinary document, and not only in edifying ways. It seems that the king, like the Palestinian Authority, finds the Israeli offer to withdraw unilaterally from another 9.1 percent of the West Bank, which the Palestinians refused to accept, a "deliberate humiliation of your so called Palestinian partners." Surely this could have been settled diplomatically, and anyway the Palestinians have indicated that they will suffice with only 0.9 percent more. Is every bump in the negotiations really a moral and historical watershed? Is every disagreement really the end of the peace process? The king was understandably miffed that Netanyahu refused to allow him to land his plane in Gaza; this is the kind of empty, petty, damaging gesture that the Likud has a knack for. But the decision to build housing for Jews in East Jerusalem is not such a gesture. Or, rather, it is a gesture that is morally and historically justified: Jerusalem is a united city that will remain Israel's capital, period. It is mischievous—it is downright dangerous for the peace process—to suggest otherwise. Is the proposed development in Jerusalem provocative for the Palestinians? Of course it is. But the Palestinians have just enjoyed the spectacle of an Israeli withdrawal, kicking and screaming, from Hebron. That withdrawal was more momentous for the Palestinian march toward statehood than anything that will or will not happen at Har Homa. For the Palestinians, is Hebron really not worth Har Homa? But then Netanyahu must placate his critics in his party. It is really bizarre to see King Hussein pretend not to understand such political realities. He owes his survival precisely to such bobbing and weaving. Indeed, his epistolary outburst seems to have been written to appease political realities of his own. Its most unfortunate passage, therefore, is the king's charge that Netanyahu, "in pushing matters to the point of securing a U.S. veto at the Security Council, [has] ill-served the image and interest of your major ally and benefactor." This, from the man who spectacularly ill-served the same image and interests of the same benefactor, when he allied himself with Saddam Hussein in 1991. Still, 1991 notwithstanding, the king of Jordan has emerged as the most powerful moral voice in his region. In his letter to Netanyahu, however, the moral voice is a little misplaced. If the Israeli prime minister flies like a hawk, he often lands like a dove. That is one of the reasons he gets into trouble with his party. And his trouble with his party is, from the standpoint of peace, a sign of progress.

NOT CERTIFIABLE: In Susan E. Reed's article, "Certifiable" (March 17), the portion of Mexico's economy that depends on illegal narcotics trade was reported to be $27-30 billion. Due to an editing error, this figure was wrongly attributed to the Justice Department instead of the Mexican attorney general's office. •

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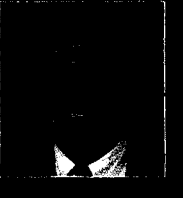

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Microcredit yields macroproblems.

BAD CREDIT

By John Buntin

It was Hillary Rodham Clinton's first press conference in more than two years, and she was excited. She had an idea, she said, a big one. Two days later she was still buzzing about it. "Whether we are talking about a rural area in South Asia or an inner city in the United States," she exclaimed last month, "[it] is an invaluable tool in alleviating poverty, promoting self-sufficiency and stimulating economic activity in some of the world's most destitute and disadvantaged communities."

The big idea was, at least in name, small: microcredit—targeting tiny loans to individual artisans and vendors in developing countries. The theory behind microcredit is that a small, smart loan, directed to someone who knows exactly what to do with it, can do more good with less money than old-fashioned multi-million-dollar aid programs. In more than a decade of work, the private and nonprofit companies that manage microcredit efforts have helped many people escape poverty.

Now, with a little help from the president and the first lady, the microcredit movement is coming to America. Just days before the first international Microcredit Summit convened last month in Washington, D.C., Mrs. Clinton joined her husband in asking Congress to appropriate $1 billion over the next five years for microcredit programs in the United States. The Clintons touted the program as an ideal way to rescue those being pushed off the dole under the new welfare law. "[We will] go national," the president declared, "with this micro idea in a very macro way."

But there are compelling reasons to doubt that microcredit can replicate its successes in the United States. Microcredit programs have generally flourished in places where the majority of the workforce is self-employed, the economy "informal" and credit shortages the primary obstacle to founding a business. The U.S. economy meets none of these criteria. Here the "formal" economy is the normal economy. Only about 15 percent of the population is self-employed. And most unemployed Americans are not frustrated entrepreneurs-in-waiting, but people who lack the skills to enter the formal economy. At the Microcredit Summit, Nancy Barry, the president of Women's World Banking, asserted that the world's poor "are the most entrepreneurial people on earth." That may be. But the American poor are surely not the United States's most entrepreneurial class.

Microcredit's history underscores its own limitations. The movement grew out of the stunning success of one institution, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. In 1976, economist Muhammad Yunus started making small loans out of his own pocket. Six years later, Yunus founded Grameen Bank. By 1995, Grameen had loaned more than $1 billion to roughly 2 million people, 95 percent of them women, while achieving a repayment rate of 98 percent.

Grameen understood the Bangladeshi economy: most workers were self-employed and struggling to survive in a makeshift market. They peddled handcrafts, baskets and food, usually from their homes. Yunus shrewdly decided to treat these people—particularly women, who were effectively barred from the formal economy—as serious businesspeople who were capable, with access to credit, of expanding their activities into full-time businesses.

He also developed an innovative lending technique—called "peer lending"—for those who lacked collateral. Rather than individuals, Grameen offered money only to small groups of borrowers, usually composed of five people. Every member of these groups thus became responsible for repaying the loan.

Grameen Bank has served as a model for microcredit programs in more than seventy countries. For Hillary Rodham Clinton, this growth is proof that microcredit has "universal relevance." But, unlike the developing world, the U.S. economy is an unfriendly place for "micro" entrepreneurs. The United States regulates rather than embraces the "informal" economy. An aspiring street vendor in New York City can't simply get a loan and start peddling his wares. He first needs a permit, which is virtually unattainable. If a woman, for instance, wished to open a catering service out of her apartment, she would likely run afoul of zoning regulations and Department of Health regulations that prohibit the public sale of foods prepared in private kitchens.

Microcredit programs established in the United States have generally struggled. An innovative young governor named Bill Clinton helped found the first one. In early 1988, Muhammad Yunus came to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and proposed that the business community band together to establish a Grameen-style microcredit program in the Arkansas delta, an overwhelmingly rural area and one of the nation's poorest. In May 1988, Governor Clinton created the Good Faith Fund and made it an affiliate of the Southern Development Bancorporation, a holding company that included several nonprofit groups and on whose board sat Mrs. Clinton.

The Good Faith Fund eagerly set out to sign up borrowers and establish peer-lending groups. By the end of 1988, it had only twenty-five borrowers. By 1989, that number had climbed to just fifty. The Good Faith Fund had also developed a 40 percent default rate and service costs of roughly $4,000 per loan, both extremely high for such small loans. The problem, the fund quickly discovered, was that many of its clients simply weren't capable of starting their own businesses. To limit defaults, the Good Faith Fund was forced to

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restrict its lending to people who had at least some history of informal entrepreneurial activity. "One might call the mindset sort of a positive hustler," says Executive Director Penny Penrose. "Someone who's going to succeed and create and sell whether or not you help them at some level."

Still, the Good Faith Fund spent far more time teaching potential borrowers about the ways of business than most microcredit programs in developing countries. Indeed, over the last nine years, it has essentially changed from a lending program to a training program. Roughly 800 people have gone through its classrooms. Of that number, only around 260 have taken out loans. And there were other problems. In the Grameen model, peer-lending groups are self-formed: applicants who already know each other band together and approach the bank for a loan. The fact that the applicants know each other, and can therefore exert moral pressure on each other, is essential to the concept of peer lending. But the Good Faith Fund was unable to attract self-formed groups. It was forced to form the groups itself, putting together coalitions of strangers. This undercut the principle of peer lending, and the fund had little early success with the practice. It now uses peer lending more as a support network than as a way to make each group member responsible for other members' loans.

Another difference between the Third World and the First emerged to plague the fund. In developing countries, the programs are allowed to charge relatively high interest rates. This, combined with economies of scale that result from fast-growing programs, allows them to recoup most of their operating costs. But developed countries tend to impose limits on interest rates; Arkansas's strict anti-usury laws would have made it impossible for the Good Faith Fund to cover most of its expenses, even if clients had been pouring in. So, while microcredit programs overseas pride themselves on self-sufficiency, the Good Faith Fund and others like it in the United States became dependent on government and foundation support. An annual report by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, one of the biggest American supporters of microcredit programs, estimates that almost 90 percent of U.S. microlenders' budgets will need to come from outside sources.

And what about welfare recipients? In 1994, the Good Faith Fund evaluated how AFDC recipients responded to its program. At first glance, the results seemed positive. The fund gave roughly 140 AFDC recipients twelve weeks of self-employment training and financing, as well as membership in a peer group. Three years later, eighty-one people had completed the program. Of those, seventy-nine are either employed, self-employed, both, or in a subsequent training program. "That program was really successful by our standards," says Penrose. And, indeed, 60 percent is an impressive rate of retention for a job-training program for AFDC recipients. But how many of those people were fully self-employed in their own businesses? Only four.

Amazingly, microcredit enthusiasts still point to the Good Faith Fund's record as proof that Grameen Bank programs can work anywhere, as well in Detroit as in Dhaka. But to see Good Faith as a ringing affirmation of microcredit's ability to help welfare recipients is to enter the world of the looking glass, where modest results are magnified into massive achievements, and where micro-ideas become macro-boasts. "This is a big idea," says the first lady, "an idea with vast potential." Or at least vast appeal to a president who has earned a reputation for thinking small and talking large.

JOHN BUNTIN writes case studies in public policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Clinton shoots down needle exchange.

LIE OF THE NEEDLE

By Stephen Chapman

The AIDS epidemic has unleashed a slew of efforts to stop transmission of the virus—from distributing condoms to teenagers to tightly screening blood transfusions. But, for years, one of the most effective and inexpensive weapons has languished on the shelf: needle exchange. Last December, the Clinton administration recommended additional money for AIDS research, but barely mentioned needle exchange. The neglect comes at a price: though the virus has abated among gay men, it has proliferated among intravenous drug users, their sexual partners and their children. According to the Centers for Disease Control, this group now accounts for a full third of new HIV infections—up from just 12 percent in 1981. The news gets worse. Unlike other groups, addicts are often cut off from new treatments because of cost or regimen. So, while some hail the coming end of the epidemic, for drug addicts the plague is just entering a new phase.

President Clinton could change all of this. Although current law prohibits federal funds for clean-syringe programs, the executive branch can lift the ban if it finds that needle exchanges slow the spread of AIDS without promoting more drug use. Clinton, facing an election last year, refused to do so. But this year, he had no political pretext. He was not only free of election pressures but Congress had handed him the perfect opportunity: it instructed the administration to report by February 15 on the efficacy of needle exchange. When the long-awaited report from the Department of Health and Human Services arrived, it declared the obvious: needle exchanges do indeed combat HIV transmission. Yet, in classic Clintonesque style, the president straddled, saying such programs may or may not

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encourage drug use. HHS hailed the report as a change in policy. Meanwhile, the ban on federal funding remains in place.

Needle-exchange advocates were understandably upset. "I'd say they mugwumped—you know, mug on one side of the fence, wump on the other," says Dave Purchase, head of the North American Syringe Exchange Network in Tacoma, Washington. "The scientists have spoken on this issue. It's time for the politicians to catch up," adds Dan Bigg, who runs Chicago's largest program. Bigg says he's $130,000 short of what he needs to keep his program going this year. Opening the federal tap even a little would help a lot.

A little more than a decade ago, needle-exchange programs began to provide sterile hypodermic syringes to drug users. The first exchange was started in Boston in 1986, and the idea soon spread to San Francisco and other cities. Often the programs defied state laws requiring a prescription to obtain a syringe and treating possession of them, except for medical purposes, as a crime. But they soon won the blessing of many mayors and police chiefs, who were willing to look the other way rather than discard a weapon against AIDS. There are now some 111 needle-exchange programs in the United States and Puerto Rico, from the biggest cities to smaller urban areas such as Rockford, Illinois, and Fairbanks, Alaska; together, they collect and distribute some 10 million syringes every year.

The initial theory behind the exchanges remains unchanged: that addicts share their needles not because they want to but because they have to. Since laws banning over-the-counter sale of syringes made the devices scarce, drug users learned to hoard, re-use and share them—even after the emergence and spread of AIDS made this potentially fatal. Grant them cheap or free access to sterile injecting equipment, activists argued, and many users would act with more regard for self-preservation. But opponents contended that anyone eager to put heroin in his arm was unlikely to be terribly fastidious about what he used to inject it. Offering addicts access to clean syringes at low or no cost, they maintained, would do little to slow the epidemic and would foster more drug addiction by signaling society's indulgence of such behavior.

Both theories were entirely plausible, but only one has turned out to be right. In recent years, one study after another has reached the same conclusion. The most definitive one was a report released in September 1995 by the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council, which concluded that "well-implemented needle exchange programs can be effective in preventing the spread of HIV and do not increase the use of illegal drugs." The council endorsed an end to the federal funding ban and proposed repealing state prescription and drug paraphernalia laws that make syringes scarce.

But the Clinton administration has apparently decided that the political price of endorsing needle exchange outweighs any lives the programs might save. Certainly, there is no potent lobby for drug addicts. And Republicans would doubtless portray a reversal as proof of Clinton's permissive attitude toward drug use. So inaction prevails. After a federally financed study by researchers at the University of California at San Francisco gave a strong endorsement to such programs in 1993, HHS asked scientists at the CDC to review the study and make their own recommendations—which turned out to be identical to those of the UCSF panel. HHS, finding the results unsatisfactory, simply declined to release the CDC analysis, even after it was leaked to *The Washington Post*.

President Clinton will never have a more auspicious opportunity to take the modest risk of giving his blessing to needle exchange. The ferocity of drug czar Barry McCaffrey has largely insulated the president from any charge of being soft on drugs. And Clinton can offer needle exchange as a way not only to prevent AIDS, but to funnel addicts into treatment programs—a claim that has the virtue of being true. Besides sterile equipment, most needle-exchange providers offer counseling and drug treatment referrals.

Lifting the ban can be easily justified to the public as a simple matter of saving lives, not just of drug users, but of their innocent spouses and children. Here Clinton can count on the backing of public health experts. A recent article in the British medical journal *The Lancet* by Peter Lurie, a physician at the Center for AIDS Research at the UCSF, and Ernest Drucker, an epidemiologist at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, estimates that, if the United States had begun widely promoting clean syringes in 1987, as Australia did, it could have prevented between 4,000 and 10,000 HIV infections between 1987 and 1995. By 2000, another 11,000 might be averted. Clinton can also defend the policy change on unsentimental fiscal grounds, since the aversion to clean-needle programs costs society a lot of money. Preventing a single HIV transmission through syringe exchanges, according to the 1993 UCSF study, costs between $3,773 and $12,000. Repealing prescription and drug paraphernalia laws offers an even better payoff, since many addicts are more than willing to spend their own cash on sterile equipment. Caring for an AIDS patient, by contrast, means an average expense of some $119,000—a cost that usually falls on taxpayers.

After the 1995 White House conference on AIDS, one attendee expressed pleasant surprise at hearing President Clinton denounce homophobia, but said it would be nice to hear him mention clean needles as well. For the president to ignore the value of needle exchange in combating AIDS is to invite a harsh historical judgment: that he knew what needed to be done but, for flimsy political reasons, refused to do it. For the likely victims of AIDS, of course, the consequences will be even worse.

STEPHEN CHAPMAN is a syndicated columnist on the staff of the *Chicago Tribune*.

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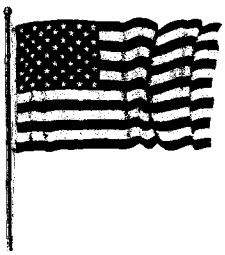

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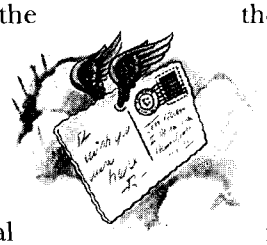
LAHORE POSTCARD

LEADER OF THE PAK

By Richard M. Murphy

"Are you a Christian or a Jew?" My Lahori journalist colleague spoke with some concern as we drove through the fetid backstreets of Pakistan's second largest city during last month's national elections. I replied, cautiously, that I was a Christian. "Thank God. Otherwise, Jew bashing is going on day and night here. You would have been extremely offended."

Conspiracy theory is a growth industry in Pakistan. It seems every political crisis, and there are many here, is due to a shifting range of malevolent, all-powerful "hidden hands." These include the CIA, the "international Zionist conspiracy" and (my personal favorite) the "Hindu-Zionist hidden hand." The latter is a presumed Israeli/Indian alliance dedicated to the destruction of Pakistan. The more rabid elements of the Pakistani media employ it to explain almost any disaster, from the dismissal of an elected government (three have bit the dust since 1988) to a terrorist bombing.



Disasters strike with depressing regularity here, often as the result of ethnic and sectarian disputes: majoritarian Sunni Muslims versus minority Shi'as, politically dominant Punjabis versus resentful citizens of Pakistan's other three provinces, Urdu-speaking migrants versus native-born Sindhis in the urban battleground of Karachi. Because local terrorists seldom claim responsibility for their atrocities, the vacuum is filled by ghostly figures of American, Indian and/or Zionist might. Responsibility for Pakistan's many woes is thus deflected away from a ruling class whose venality has historically been matched only by its incompetence.

During the recent election campaign, the Zionist hidden hand floated over one candidate in particular, the former Pakistani cricket hero and international playboy Imran Khan. A year ago, Khan was a resolutely apolitical figure. Since retiring from cricket in 1992, after leading Pakistan to a World Cup Championship, he had devoted what energy he could spare from his hectic social life to the construction of a hospital in Lahore, dedicated to the memory of his mother, a cancer victim.

In early 1996, Khan turned his charisma and immense popularity to political account, launching a new political party called the Movement for Justice. When asked how he hoped to win an election with zero political experience, Khan's stock reply was that he and his party were inexperienced only in "looting and plundering the country."

What does this have to do with the Hindu-Zionist conspiracy? Well may you ask. In the eyes of the conspiratorialists, the case against Khan is clear. He recently married the 23-year-old English society beauty Jemima Goldsmith. Jemima's father, the Anglo-French financier Sir James Goldsmith, is one of Europe's richest men. Sir James's father was Jewish. There you have it.

Once and future Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who led his Muslim League to triumph in last month's parliamentary elections, trumpeted Khan's Jewish connection in a campaign that generally played the Semitic card heavily. Sharif denounced candidates backed by Jews and outsiders (a near redundancy in Pakistani terms), a not-subtle reference to Khan. Behind the scenes, according to one of Pakistan's leading reporters, Adnan Adil, "the Muslim League rank and file did a lot of propaganda about the Jewish faction."

Khan was not without allies, however. Much Pakistani political behavior is determined by the hoary cliché that your enemy's enemy is your friend. Thus, Sharif's arch-enemy Benazir Bhutto, whose government's dismissal on corruption charges last November precipitated these elections, sprang to Khan's defense, saying he was not a Jewish agent. She held her rhetorical fire for Sharif, and particularly for President Farooq Leghari.

Leghari dismissed Bhutto under Pakistan's controversial Eighth Amendment, a legacy of General Mohammed Zia ul-Haq's martial law that allows the president to can an elected government. Since General Zia's 1988 death in a plane crash (which Pakistanis universally blame on the CIA) three civilian governments in succession have been ousted under the Eighth Amendment.

One dramatic result of February's election has been the near total eclipse of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. In an election marked by widespread voter apathy (turnout was an estimated 36 percent), the PPP won a mere eighteen seats in the National Assembly, to the Muslim League's 135. Many here attribute this debacle to the spectacular corruption of Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, a polo-playing profiteer whom Bhutto imprudently appointed Minister for Investment. This was Benazir's second dismissal. The first, in 1990, was also on corruption charges and also featured Zardari. "In those days Zardari was called Mr. Ten Percent," said one disgruntled man outside a polling station on the rural outskirts of Lahore. "Now he is Mr. Hundred Percent."

Two days before the election I attended Bhutto's final election rally in Bhatti Chowk, a public square in downtown Lahore where both she and her late father, the former President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in happier days, had addressed tens of thousands of passionate PPP supporters. The senior Bhutto was executed on political murder charges in 1979 following his ouster in a military coup staged by General Zia.

This grim historical irony is lost on no one, least of all Bhutto herself. Speaking under overcast winter skies to

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a meager and largely silent crowd, she railed against "President Farooq ul-Haq." Bhutto is a fine orator in the richly metaphorical South Asian tradition. At times, her rhyming Urdu cadences recall the Reverend Jesse Jackson. "There is a new disease in Pakistan, and its name is Leghari. We must cure Pakistan with an injection. This injection is called arrow [the PPP's electoral symbol]. Vote for the arrow!"

That night I also attended Imran Khan's final rally in Lahore. He pulled a crowd of perhaps 2,000 cheering male cricket fans, most of whom did not look old enough to vote. After speeches by the local Movement for Justice candidate and others, Khan was hustled through the crowd to the platform, wearing an Afghan wool cap on his head and a fixed half smile on his handsome face. (Khan looks like a taller version of his friend Mick Jagger, with less lips and more muscle.) Khan devoted most of his speech to a vitriolic attack on Nawaz Sharif, calling him "that circus tiger" and other insults of a similar ilk. (The political symbol of Sharif's Muslim League is a tiger.)

Imran Khan's party won no seats in the election, but he gets credit for bringing the corruption issue to the center of political debate in Pakistan. The new prime minister is himself a veteran of corruption scandals, having been dismissed on the usual charges in 1993. In the tradition of losing Pakistani politicians, Benazir Bhutto claims President Leghari rigged the elections to keep her out of power. This charge convinced few outside the PPP, and even Bhutto stalwarts concede privately that they would have lost in any case. Nawaz Sharif, meanwhile, faces the daunting challenge of balancing Pakistan's severe international debt obligations with its insatiable military budget and the needs of a population afflicted by chronic unemployment and inflation. He has asked overseas Pakistanis to help meet a foreign exchange crunch by depositing money to interest-bearing accounts in Pakistan, but such gimmickry will not forestall the painful political and economic choices that lie in Pakistan's future.

After leaving Imran Khan's rally, I watched Nawaz Sharif's final electoral procession pass up the Mall, a gracious architectural legacy of the British Raj. Sharif processed standing up through the open sunroof of a sport utility vehicle, flanked by a few close aides. As they turned off the Mall down a side street, a blaze of celebratory rockets exploded near the car, raining sparks down on the candidate's head.

As one, Sharif's aides extended their hands to shield him. This odd but impressively operatic tableau was marred only by the rest of the procession, which included a van emblazoned with the slogan "LOVE MARINE" and a flatbed truck bearing a cage in which reposed two live tigers from the Lahore zoo. Both van and tigers missed the turn taken by Nawaz Sharif's jeep. In the fading glow of fireworks, they continued up the Mall into the night.

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Can the government stop cyberporn?

ZONED OUT

By Jeffrey Rosen

Spring fever is in the air at the Supreme Court as the justices prepare to hear arguments about the constitutionality of the Communications Decency Act on March 19. To familiarize themselves with the technological obstacles to finding pornography in cyberspace, some law clerks have obtained lists of especially salacious addresses on the World Wide Web and diligently browsed at their leisure. Not since the justices gathered to watch dirty movies in the basement of the Court during the 1960s (Justice Harlan, almost blind, asked his clerks to narrate as the action unfolded) have clerkly duties been quite so arduous.

In cyberspace, too, the mood is giddy. "WHY WE'LL WIN" boasts the website of the Electronic Frontier Foundation; and, indeed, there is a widespread expectation that the justices, in *ACLU* v. *Reno*, will agree with the three district court judges in Philadelphia who struck down the Communications Decency Act last June. But the triumphalism is premature. In light of technological and legal changes over the past year, there is now a plausible argument for *upholding* the constitutionality of the CDA that a majority of the Court might find convincing. In capsule form, here it is.

The CDA has two parts. The first part says, in effect, that if you display "indecent" or "patently offensive" material on the Internet, "in a manner available to a person under 18 years of age," you are a criminal. The second part says that you have a defense to prosecution

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if you take "reasonable, effective, and appropriate actions" to restrict access to minors, by "requiring use of a verified credit card, debit account, adult access code, or adult personal identification number."

The best argument for upholding this electronic Comstockery can be summed up in a single world: zoning. Solicitor General Walter Dellinger, in his brief, and Lawrence Lessig of the University of Chicago, in a series of powerful articles, urge us to view the CDA as an Internet zoning ordinance that channels indecent material away from children while guaranteeing full access to adults. First Amendment law recognizes three categories of sexually explicit speech: obscenity, which can be banned; ordinary speech, which must be protected; and indecency, which can be restricted for children but not for adults. In its zoning cases, the Court has said that government can move porn shops to red light districts, where children can't easily find them, or require porn sellers to check identification before selling over the counter.

In cyberspace, of course, it's much harder to discriminate on the basis of age. Users are anonymous, and teenage boys don't have to wear stilts and a mustache to disguise the fact that they are teenage boys. Just as clustering porn shops near the docks is a permissible way of discouraging crime and sloth in residential neighborhoods, the argument goes, putting porn behind electronic doors is a permissible way of ensuring that the Internet is the kind of neighborhood that parents will let their children enter in the first place.

When the three judges in Philadelphia rejected the zoning argument last June, they assumed that individual speakers on the Internet would have to set up their own adult identification sites to avoid prosecution, a prospect they found "either technologically impossible or economically prohibitive." But, since last June, the technology has changed in response to the market. Services with names like "Adult Check" and "Porno Press" now provide adult identification numbers to individual Internet users for a one-time fee of $9.95, charged to a credit card; the number then serves as a "key" that provides easy access to all the Internet sites that put up the "gates" required by the CDA. This system is no longer "economically prohibitive" for the Internet sites that use it; on the contrary, "Adult Check" actually *pays* the sites a fee for each user they refer.

So the age verification system doesn't appear to be an insuperable burden for porn suppliers. Is it an unconstitutional burden for adult porn consumers? The answer isn't obvious. Obtaining an adult identification number requires some effort, a minimal fee, a credit card or money order and the associated stigma of having the fee show up on your credit card bill. In the future, civil liberties organizations might set up their own adult verification sites to minimize the stigma—you could order your password from "ACLU check" rather than "Adult Check"—but consumers of porn would still have to identify themselves as consumers of porn. (Today, by contrast, free samples can be downloaded anonymously from the Web and from Usenet newsgroups.) Whether the embarrassment of this act of self-identification is comparable to the embarrassment of being observed by your neighbors sneaking out of an adult bookstore is hard to say. In an adult bookstore, at least, you can wear dark glasses and pay cash to protect your anonymity. If the Court decides, in the end, that the disincentives created by the adult identification system would greatly restrict the ability of adults to buy *Playboy*, it should probably strike down the CDA. But, because the Internet has vastly diminished the opportunity costs associated with buying porn (you no longer need to drive from Cincinnati to Kentucky, for example), the justices might reasonably conclude that the burdens of an adult I.D. are comparatively small.

The opponents of the CDA have another argument along the same lines. An adult identification system isn't the "least restrictive means" of keeping porn out of the hands of children, they argue, because there's a less restrictive, and more effective, technology available: the Platform for Internet Content Selection, or PICS. PICS is a rating and filtering technology, like the V-chip, that permits content providers, or third-party interest groups, to set up their own private rating systems for any "PICS-compatible" document that is posted online. Individual users can then choose the rating system that best reflects their own values, and any material that offends them will be blocked from their homes.

The ACLU praises PICS for allowing individual users to exercise perfect choice about what comes into their homes. Lawrence Lessig, by contrast, suggests that "PICS is the devil," from a free speech perspective, because it allows censorship at any point on the chain of distribution. Countries like China or Singapore, or American corporations afraid of lawsuits, can decide what kind of speech they want to make available to their workers, and impose draconian restrictions from above. In the long run, Lessig suggests, PICS will suppress more speech than an adult identification system would, because it will allow those who control access to individual terminals to filter out uncongenial ideas. But for the Supreme Court to accept this as a constitutional argument would require it to embrace a collectivist view of the First Amendment, which says that citizens should be exposed to a diversity of views, whether they want to be or not. If, on the other hand, you believe that the First Amendment is more concerned with preventing government from restricting the autonomy of individual speakers, then PICS seems less intrusive than checking I.D.s.

Up until now, I've been discussing the CDA as if its language about "indecent" or "patently offensive" material, "as measured by contemporary community standards" that "depicts or describes sexual or excretory activities or organs," refers only to the kind of sexually explicit speech that the Supreme Court has said can be restricted for children. The Clinton Justice Department has tried to support this view by announcing that it will enforce the statute only

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against commercial pornographers. But this is hardly the most natural reading of the statute. In striking down the CDA, two of the three judges in Philadelphia held that the phrases "indecent" and "patently offensive" are unconstitutionally vague and might inhibit speech that has nothing to do with pornography, such as discussion groups about gay rights or Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The vagueness argument, however, is hard to sustain in light of an unfortunate Supreme Court opinion handed down on June 28, 1996, several weeks after the Philadelphia decision. Justice Stephen Breyer, joined by three of his colleagues, held that the Cable Television Consumer Protection Act, which permits cable operators to ban programming that depicts "sexual or excretory activities or organs in a patently offensive manner," is vague but not "impermissably vague." The "patently offensive" language for defining indecency, Breyer held breezily, was "similar" (although not identical) to the Supreme Court's test for defining obscenity; and Breyer concluded that Congress intended to prohibit "pictures of oral sex, bestiality and rape, and not ... scientific or educational programs (at least unless done with a highly unusual lack of concern for viewer reaction)."

The imprecision of Breyer's analysis threatens to confuse an already confused area of the law. But, in light of Breyer's holding that the government has a compelling interest in shielding children from "indecent" speech, it will be hard to argue that the identical language in the CDA is unconstitutionally vague. Opponents can try to argue that the amorphous "indecency" standard is especially inappropriate for cyberspace, where everyone is a broadcaster, but not everyone has a lawyer. (In real space, there are just a few broadcasters, and all of them have lawyers.) Moreover, the category of "indecency" was cobbled together because of the uniquely intrusive qualities of television, and on the Internet it's easier to protect children with electronic gateways. But this ends up being an argument in favor of the CDA, not against it.

Justice Breyer's indulgent view of the Cable Television Act shows the hazards of constitutional pragmatism. He criticized his colleagues for lacking the "flexibility necessary to allow government to respond to very serious practical problems," such as protecting children from indecency. But he failed to consider the degree to which the distinctions between indecency, pornography and obscenity are increasingly unstable in a global information age. Cable television and the Internet have called into question the distinction between pornography and obscenity by exposing the incoherence of geographically identifiable "community standards": especially in cyberspace, it's unrealistic to expect individual speakers to be able to predict the standards of the thousands of communities that their words and pictures may enter without their consent. It wouldn't be inconsistent with recent trends in law and technology for the Court to uphold the Communications Decency Act. It would, however, be a mistake. •

Conservative youths despair, drink, debauch.

SPRING BREAKDOWN

By Stephen Glass

On the fourth floor of Washington's Omni Shoreham Hotel, eight young men sit facing each other on the edge of a pair of beds. They are all 20 or 21 and are enrolled in Midwestern colleges. Each is wearing a white or blue shirt with the top button unfastened, and each has his striped tie loosened. One of the young men, an Ohioan, is wearing a green and white button that reads: "Save the Males." The minibar is open and empty little bottles of booze are scattered on the carpet. On the bed, a Gideon Bible, used earlier in the night to resolve an argument, is open to Exodus. In the bathroom, the tub is filled with ice and the remnants of three cases of Coors Light. The young men pass around a joint, counterclockwise. "I'm telling you, I'm telling you, we don't know what we're doing," says Jason, a brown-haired freckled boy from Iowa, between puffs. "We've got no mission. We've got no direction. Conservatives—we're like a guy who has to pee lost in the desert, searching for a tree." The other seven young men nod and mumble in agreement.

Over the next hour, in a haze of beer and pot, and in between rantings about feminists, gays and political correctness, the young men hatch a plan. Seth, a meaty quarterback from a small college in Indiana, and two others will drive to a local bar. There, the three will choose the ugliest and loneliest woman they can find. "Get us a real heifer, the fatter the better, bad acne

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would be a bonus," Michael shouts. He is so drunk he doesn't know he is shouting. Seth will lure the victim, whom they call a "whale," back to the hotel room. The five who stay behind will hide under the beds. After Seth undresses the whale, the five will jump out and shout, "We're beaching! Whale spotted!" They will take a photograph of the unfortunate woman.

This is the face of young conservatism in 1997: pissed off and pissed; dejected, depressed, drunk and dumb. The eight young men were visiting Washington, D.C., in early March, as they did last year and the year before that, for the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), arguably the most important event of the conservative year. Over the past twenty-four years, CPAC, hosted jointly by the American Conservative Union and *Human Events*, and sponsored by every conservative group from the Christian Coalition to Citizens for a Sound Economy, has become the greatest draw on the right-wing circuit. Last year, more than 1,000 conservatives paid about $100 just to hear the lectures. Many coughed up another $200 to attend the banquet and receptions. During the 1996 primaries, every major Republican presidential candidate tried to shore up their conservative credentials by speaking at CPAC. As the young men on the fourth floor smoked and swilled and schemed, Jack Kemp was delivering this year's keynote address.

CPAC became a rite of passage for young conservatives in the Reagan glory days. Every year, hundreds of college students and recent graduates drove to Washington from around the country. Often sleeping five to a room, they made up nearly half of the participants, and they gave CPAC the abundant raw energy that made the event special. They filled the conference room to hear discourses in tax cutting (good) and feminism (bad). They gave standing ovations to Phyllis Schlafly and Pat Robertson. Every year, they believed victory was close at hand. Patience, they said, was all that was needed.

But, this year, CPAC bore no resemblance to a victory party. Turnout was down 50 percent. Not just seats, but entire tables were empty during Newt Gingrich's opening address. Vendors said they sold fewer GOP buttons, stuffed animals, aprons, T-shirts, books and tea-cozies than in years past. His arms windmilling and flailing in the air, Gingrich begged the audience to be more excited. This is "one of the first times that I've ever seen where the winning team feels defeated," he screamed at the glum faces. "And people walk around with long jaws and talk about how concerned they are that the Republicans lost their way." Later in the day, when Alan Keyes, one of the right's most popular speakers, ascended the podium, the room was even emptier. Keyes often paused as if waiting for thunderous applause, but there was only silence. When he looked up, puzzled, a few individual claps could be heard from the back of the room. "For those people who have [been conservatives their whole lives] and are stumbling about right now asking themselves all kinds of strange questions about conservatism, I simply feel sorry for them," Keyes proclaimed. "We have the moral structure to lead us ahead." Ralph Reed, the Christian Coalition's executive director, spent much of his time at the podium, blaming the GOP funk on "muddle-headed" moderates who don't accept a socially conservative agenda.

Something quite peculiar has happened to conservatives. As they keep telling each other, they should be delighted with the way things are going. In 1996, they passed a test of historic importance in holding Congress. Although weakened, Newt Gingrich remains speaker, and the vacuum left by his political diminution has been at least partly filled by Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. The Democratic president is in the worst trouble of his frequently troubled tenure, and these troubles will, at the least, consume the president's attention and energy for much of 1997. In recent weeks, the trouble has spread to Vice President Gore, the presumptive Democratic nominee in 2000. Conservative ideas so dominate the political agenda that the debate between the White House and Congress largely concerns questions of degree and methodology, not principle. By logic, this should be a season of GOP contentment, or at least relative satisfaction.

Yet the sound of right-wingers bitching and moaning is all over Washington. The money wing of the GOP and the Christian moralist wing are no longer on speaking terms; they snipe at each other from opposing columns on the op-ed page of *The Washington Times*. *The Weekly Standard*, which seeks to supplant *National Review* as conservatism's arbiter, ran a cover story exhorting the faithful to shape up and get tough. But the most telling of all these signs of conservative malaise is that, suddenly, the movement's youth look like a lost generation. The youth turnout at this year's CPAC was so dismally low that the event's organizers won't release specific numbers, but veterans of the event estimated it was 75 percent less than in years past. Several College Republicans running for national chairman canceled the small parties (called, in genteel fashion, "hospitalities") that have been used for years to woo supporters. And, at a booth for recent college graduates, stacks of free blue and white "CONSERVATIVE AND PROUD" bumper stickers remain untouched. Meanwhile $1 "SHOW US THE WAY" stickers, bemoaning the void of leadership, sell out. For youth at CPAC, idealism is out. Despair and hedonism are in.

Around 9:30 p.m., Seth, Rick and Jason drive to a popular downtown bar. They park in front of a fire hydrant. Within fifteen minutes they spot their victim. About 5'3" and stout, she is standing near the bar, alone. Her lipstick has rubbed off on her wine glass, leaving only the cherry outline. Jason says this may be the only time he has wished a woman would wear a longer skirt to hide her legs. Seth

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walks up to her, and they exchange smiles. Forty minutes and two gin and tonics later, he invites her back to his hotel to get stoned. He signals the other two, and they drive back to make sure everyone is hidden under the beds. Twenty minutes after that, Seth arrives with the young woman in a taxi. The two go into Seth's room. From the hallway, they can be heard through the door talking loudly. Half an hour later, the woman begins screaming. The door flies open, and she runs out. Tears, black from the mascara, stream down her face. She is holding her shoes and gripping her crumpled blouse to her chest. Inside the room, Charlie gives Seth a high-five. He promises to get the photo developed and duplicated in the morning. The men start chanting Seth's name over and over. Shirtless Seth bows and then flexes his biceps over his head. He grunts loudly.

This repellent scene was only a little beyond the norm of the conference. A wash of despair and alcohol and brutishness hung over the whole thing. Everywhere I went, it seemed, something sad or sordid was underway, or just finished, or about to begin. Halfway through the Keyes speech, I leave to go to the men's room. Inside, a wiry mustached twentysomething is getting to second base with a svelte blonde. The woman is sitting on the sink counter, her white blouse unbuttoned and hands above her head, pressed against the mirror. His face is buried between her breasts. I ask them why they ditched Keyes.

"Get out of here. Can't you see we're busy? This is way not cool," the man snaps back.

"Since I've already interrupted you, could you please just quickly answer the question?" I ask politely.

"Get out. Get out. Look, it's just not interesting listening to all them. I was having fun here. Now get out," he yells.

The blushing woman starts buttoning up her shirt to leave. But the man pleads: "Come on, stay. Please stay. You know this is what it's about."

A hotel janitor says he discovered two college students having sex on the dais in the middle of the night. At 4 a.m., in the hotel's empty garage, three students smoke pot. They explain that the sidewalk is too public, and they don't want the professor who came with them to smell it in their rooms.

Kids at CPAC have always gotten drunk and laid, but that wasn't always the primary reason they came. This year, it seems, it was. "Yes, of course we're here to have fun," explains 19-year-old Jon Segura, a Vermont student who shakes hands with everyone who walks by the College Republicans' booth. "We like to say that up in Vermont there are more cows than girls.... And sometimes you can't tell which one is which. It's not the same here." Several college sophomores standing around the Christian Coalition booth say that they party so hard because partying is all that the event—all that conservatism—really offers them. "Our problem is there is no defined torchbearer," explains Jason Burgen, the treasurer for North Carolina's College Republicans. "Now there is no Reagan, no one to lead us. So, there's a cynicism and a depression that has set in."

On Friday night, forty of the young conservatives ditch Lott's speech and pack a sweaty hotel room on the second floor. On the door someone has taped a sign that reads: "The lost ones—in here." Again, the bathtub is filled with beer, and a thick cloud of marijuana smoke hangs above the crowd. A red-headed guy whose name tag only says "Greg" tries unsuccessfully to program the pay-per-view to show an X-rated movie. Almost everyone in the room says they supported Phil Gramm or Pat Buchanan in last year's election.

"Look around, you'll see we're wandering," says Chuck Reingold, a College Republican from California. "I didn't even sign up for the conference this year. What's there to learn? You see that? That's why I come now." Reingold points to the bed. A short, busty woman is standing on the foot of the bed to kiss a very tall man. One hand is wrapped around his torso, the other is holding a cigarette with an ever-extending and fragile ash. When the two come up for air, the woman tucks her cigarette-free hand into the man's front pocket. She is, it turns out, a 22-year-old Marylander, and a big fan of the Republicans' chief moralizer, Bill Bennett. "He has some good morals to impart, and I really like his book," she says. "Is that an okay answer? I'm not really sure what else to say."

As the night drags on, two people begin snorting what looks like cocaine in the bathroom. Several bottles of vodka are brought in. By 1 a.m., more than half the guests have paired up and are making out. The fog of marijuana and cigarette smoke gives the scene an unfocused, almost slow-motion quality. Two women wearing Buchanan buttons, and swaying to a beat only in their heads, move from man to man along the windows, kissing the men and rubbing their breasts against them. One of the partygoers invites "everyone who wants to get naked" to his hotel room. Five men and four women, all college students, high and drunk, follow him to the elevator.

In the get-naked room, everyone disrobes immediately, without a hint of embarrassment. One couple fondles each other in the corner. A muscular man, apparently hallucinating, prances around the room like a ballet dancer. A woman locks herself in the bathroom, crying and shouting out the name "Samuel." No one knows who Samuel is. The rest lounge on the beds, watching television and eating pretzels. They stare glassily at the screen, and, when they speak, they sound like they are talking through Jell-O. Among the naked bodies on the bed is Cynthia, a Dole supporter who lives less than a mile from the hotel. "What would give you the idea we're having problems? Huh? Why do you think that?" she asks me. "What was I saying? Oh, yeah. This is, like, just how the movement is now. Get used to it." •

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Jude Wanniski, the GOP's odd man in.

PROPHET MOTIVE

By Jonathan Chait

Jude Wanniski, who does not bother with the pretense of false modesty, calls himself "the most influential political economist of the last generation." He's right, too. This is a man who single-handedly transformed the discombobulated murmurings of a fringe sect into the central idea of modern economic conservatism. The idea was called supply-side economics, and it was, not very long ago, considered antithetical to every principle of conservative economic theory. Wanniski's pet idea gave Republicans, and conservatives, what they had been lacking for fifty years: a taxing policy that could compete in popularity with the Democrats' vote-getting spending policy. Supply-side theory may not make fiscal sense, but it certainly has worked politically: people naturally appreciate a theory that validates not paying taxes. For this, one would think that conservatives owe Wanniski a lifetime of thanks and honor.

And yet here is the strange thing. Intellectually triumphant, Wanniski finds himself now personally forsaken. His fellow conservatives want no part of him. They regard him as an embarrassment. When they speak of him at all, it is to question his sanity. *The Weekly Standard*, edited by Republican strategist Bill Kristol (who in a 1993 *National Review* article described Wanniski as one of "our leaders on economic thinking"), has in the last year published a profile and seven short items devoted to ridiculing the former leader. Having embraced the essence of Jude Wanniski's nutty economic theory, the Republican Party has now concluded that Wanniski is ... a nut.

"Now, what does 'nut' mean?" asks Wanniski, emitting a low cackle. "Thomas Edison was a nut, Leibniz was a nut, Galileo was a nut, so forth and so on. Everybody who comes with a new idea to the conventional wisdom, comes with an idea that's so far outside the mainstream, that's considered nutty." There is a deeply satisfied note in Wanniski's voice as he says this. He takes the charge of nuttism as a sign of his worth, proof that he is, as he has so many times explained so patiently to so many people, absolutely right in all that he says.

The point at which conservatives began thinking, or at least saying, that one of their great thinkers was operating with a few cards shy of a deck is easy to pinpoint. It was when evidence began emerging that the great thinker had fallen in love with Louis Farrakhan. The first sign occurred during the 1996 presidential campaign, when Jack Kemp, Wanniski's most important and faithful disciple, offered some kind words for the Million Man March. Outraged party officials quickly traced this sentiment to Wanniski. (It wasn't difficult; virtually every political sentiment Kemp has ever had first belonged to Wanniski.) In a campaign postmortem column, George Will pronounced the conservative establishment's new judgment on Wanniski: "crackpot adviser."

The way Wanniski sees it, communion with a man most Republicans and conservatives regard as a racist, anti-Semitic hatemonger was a logical outcome of supply-side theory. Since supply-side economics helps most those at the bottom, Wanniski believes, its natural constituency is not the wealthy but the poor. Thus, Farrakhan, a representative of society's dispossessed, was an appropriate, even inevitable, target for conversion. Wanniski began his charm offensive in 1995 with a barrage of phone calls and faxes to officials at the Nation of Islam. He kept it up, and up, and up—that is the Wanniski way: never one fax when ten will do. Wanniski worked the Nation of Islam hierarchy as he had once worked the Reagan hierarchy. Finally, last December, Wanniski won a meeting with the great man himself, at his "palatial" home. He subsequently described the meeting in one of the memoranda he blast-faxes on a nearly daily basis to clients, pols and journalists.

Over dinner ("soup, fish and vegetables and an apple pudding dessert"), Wanniski wrote, he and Farrakhan had hashed out Jews, conspiracy theory and taxes for more than five hours. "I expressed my belief that Jewish leaders fear he could lead the black electorate away from the Democratic Party and into opposition of support for Israel," Wanniski recounted. In the first two hours, Wanniski and Farrakhan began to find their way toward a meeting of the minds.

Farrakhan, as less admiring observers than Wanniski have noticed, has a tendency to see the world in terms of ugly and crackpot-ish conspiracies generally involving Jews, money and white evil. Wanniski says he made Farrakhan see these in a new light. "The longer I'm talking," Wanniski told me, "the more he is seeing that what he thought was a conspiracy turns out to be just a

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problem of economic theory." And the really beautiful thing was that the problem of economic theory, it turned out, *was society's failure to embrace supply-side ideology*. A synthesis of two great philosophies: The White Man Is Keeping Us Down With The Capital Gains Tax.

Wanniski says he spent three hours giving Farrakhan the rough outline of supply-side thought. "My supply-side perspective on the history of the twentieth century was one he had never heard before," the memo reported, "and he drank it in as if he had just come upon an oasis in a desert."

When Wanniski recalls the dawning realization that it all fit together—the gold standard, the Laffer Curve, the Jews, Karl Marx, the Federal Reserve—he relates it in a tone of rushed urgency appropriate to recounting a great historical event (to be fair, Wanniski relates every scene involving Wanniski in tones appropriate to recounting a great historical event).

"Elijah Muhammed—who was, I guess, the guy who started all this theory in the Nation of Islam—had warned in the 1960s about the United States going off the gold standard," Wanniski told me. "There is throughout the history of the world going back millennia, when governments break their pledges of keeping the money as good as gold, the people who suffer the most are the poor people. And so even in the Million Man March, even in the beginning years, Farrakhan was talking about the Federal Reserve being part of the problems of the black community. So that when we're sitting down finally talking, and I'm putting all this together for Farrakhan, he's seeing that it's not a conspiracy of people smoking long, black cigars trying to figure out how to keep the black guys in their place, he's seeing that it is really a struggle that has gone on from the beginning of time between old money and new money. And then [I told him] of the paper I wrote called 'Karl Marx Revisited,' saying that there's not only Karl Marx . . . [Marx and] Ludwig von Mises are making the same arguments from different sides of the political spectrum on how the people of wealth use their political power to prevent people from climbing up from below. They use the tax system. So, he's saying, 'Gosh, I have to learn this. I'm not familiar with any of this.' "

Since then, the relationship between the two men of numbers (those who heard Farrakhan's Million Man speech will perhaps recall his very, very complete explanation of the significance of the number 19, not to mention 55 and 9) has blossomed. The affair reached its apogee two weeks ago, when Farrakhan joined House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich, the columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, and other political figures speaking at Wanniski's annual client conference in Boca Raton, Florida. There Farrakhan made good on his desire to master the mysteries of the supply-side faith. "Even at the conference, he saw me standing outside at the newsstand, during one of the breaks, and he said to me, 'Tell me, what is this you're talking about—static analysis and dynamic analysis?' " It was a request akin to asking a Scientologist to explain dianetics.

Wanniski recalls the way he told it: " 'Imagine you're selling ice cream, and the ice cream cones are a dollar each, and you sell ten ice cream cones, and now you've got ten dollars. Now you decide you're going to make more money, you're going to charge $1,000 for each cone. Well, you sell ten of them, you have $10,000. That's static analysis.' I said, 'Dynamic analysis, you quickly see that no one buys an ice cream cone, and you get nothing. Behavior changes.' So—ah!—he understands this immediately. So Senator [John] Ashcroft, the next day he comes in, and he's yelling about how we've got to find some way to get more dynamic analysis and the whole room bursts into applause, and I look down and here's Farrakhan clapping the loudest."

By now, Wanniski regards Farrakhan as well on his way down the road to Damascus: "He is as close to a Cato libertarian as you can find." On the other, somewhat more touchy front—the Jews—the verdict is less clear. For his part, though, Wanniski has met Farrakhan more than halfway on the Jewish question. Wanniski explained Farrakhan's position sympathetically in a recent Internet posting: "What you see is a media image based on his complaints about Jewish *political* leaders who are trying to destroy the Nation of Islam, out of concern that Farrakhan's political power is a threat to the state of Israel."

And, in a recent memo to the editor of TNR, Wanniski analyzed the racial divide in America thus: "Farrakhan has every reason to be disturbed at being on that *inferior* side of the divide. On the white side, there is of course little doubt that pound for pound American Jews are the most powerful and influential of all segments of our society—in every professional field of endeavor. In addition, their history asserts a claim of superiority that has made Jews of all people the most resistant to inter-marriage with non-Jews, even to this day. Why is it any surprise that there is now tension between the largest bloc of people at the bottom of the power pyramid and the smallest bloc of the rich and the powerful?"

Wanniski is unwilling even to question Farrakhan's manifestly loopy and incoherent theories of numerology. "[O]ther religions, including Christianity, are big on numbers too," he wrote. "Friday the 13th is unlucky because of Good Friday and the 13th man at the Last Supper. The divinity is three persons in one. Etc." Nor is he willing to concede that Farrakhan should renounce those aspects of the Nation of Islam's catechism and his own utterances that whites and Jews find offensive: "If you base your hostile position on the grounds that Farrakhan must renounce this, that and the other stuff that has appeared over the years, you don't allow Farrakhan room to maneuver his followers. The wise, old Jewish leaders that I'm working with tell me they understand that, for every inch that Farrakhan moves, he has to get something in return. We are trying to move mountains."

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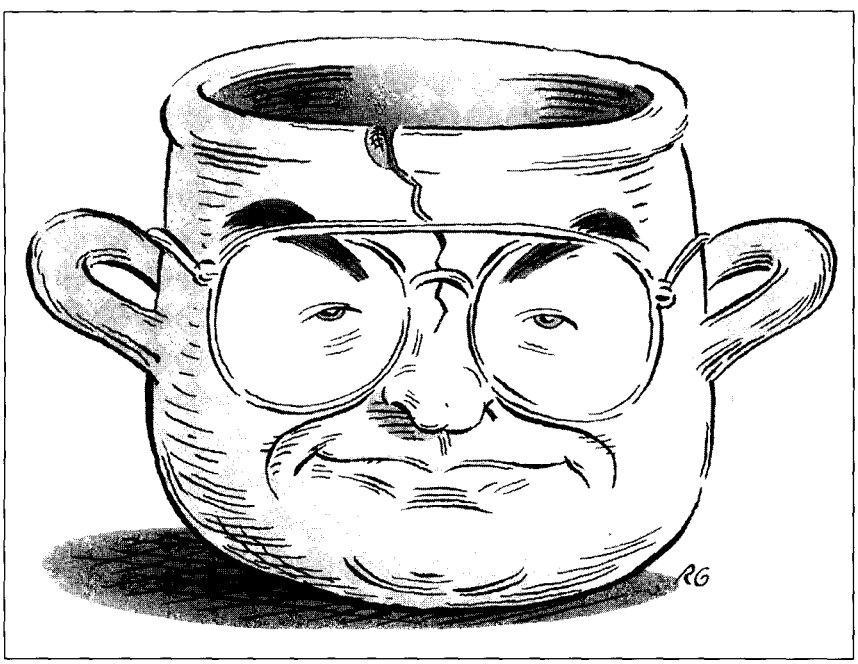
The deliciousness of all this is that Wanniski has always been a bit of—whatever you want to call it—a nut, a crank, a crackpot, a flake. And it was precisely this quality that gave him his strength. There is no courage of conviction quite like that of the fruit loop. Many Republicans embrace supply-side theory for the cover it affords them in doling out tax breaks to upper-class constituents and financial backers. Wanniski never harbored an ounce of such cynicism. He has always been impelled by a nearly monomaniacal conviction that his ideas are absolutely right and absolutely moral.

When *Wall Street Journal* editorial page editor Robert Bartley hired him in 1972, Wanniski had already undertaken an informal series of tutoring lessons with a young right-wing economist in the Office of Management and Budget named Arthur Laffer. Laffer entranced Wanniski with his notion that a tax cut could cure the inflation of the mid-1970s and actually raise government revenues. Mainstream economic thinking across the spectrum rejected this possibility. Before supply-side economics, conservatives differentiated themselves from liberals mainly by their suspicion of deficits. During the Great Depression Herbert Hoover enacted a tax increase. Gerald Ford proposed one as late as 1974. The classic conservative position is known today as the sensible center. Laffer's theory defined a new position on the right, ultimately revolutionizing the terms of economic debate.



JUDE WANNISKI BY ROBERT GROSSMAN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

At the time, though, Laffer didn't grasp this. He had nothing more than a disparate set of unconventional observations, gleaned in part from another renegade academic named Robert Mundell. Wanniski recognized the implications of Laffer's idea. It meant the agonizing trade-offs that consumed economics—restraint versus stimulus, inflation versus unemployment—simply did not exist. Poverty and malaise owed their existence not to any underlying economic weakness but to the simple ignorance of the nation's political and economic leaders. If they could be made to understand Laffer's revelation, prosperity beckoned. "At that moment," Wanniski later recalled, "I became a true zealot."

Wanniski converted Bartley first. The two, along with Laffer and Mundell, held regular dinner meetings to synthesize the new theory. Neoconservative godfather Irving Kristol prodded Wanniski to set out his views in his quarterly journal, *The Public Interest*. Bartley and Wanniski pounded away on the *Journal*'s pages. These forums allowed the true believers to reinforce each other without criticism or peer review from nettlesome skeptics. This intellectual insulation, a hallmark of crankism, fostered the overbearing certainty that characterizes the supply-siders.

Only such a cloistered environment could have yielded so confident a manifesto as Wanniski's subsequent *The Way the World Works*, whose funding Irving Kristol arranged. The book has a modest aim. It reinterprets human history as a function of tax rates.

Wanniski's editorial writing job metamorphosed into an evangelical mission. He spent his days stalking the halls of Congress, collaring anyone who would listen. During one legendary dinner he instructed Laffer to scribble on a cocktail napkin a curve purporting to demonstrate that lower taxes would reduce the budget deficit. Wanniski's tireless evangelism was infectious, particularly among those whose lives had been hitherto unencumbered by ideas. One day, Wanniski wandered into the office of Congressman Jack Kemp, an ex-quarterback with national ambitions but little—beyond past football glories—to offer the blue-collar district that had narrowly elected him. The two spoke all afternoon and long into the night, and Wanniski had his first really important political disciple.

And Wanniski's zeal paid off in policy terms, too. He helped engineer the Kemp-Roth tax cut, a bill that narrowly failed in Congress but later won the backing of Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign and was signed into law in 1981.

Even while churning out supportive editorials, Wanniski worked the Hill on Kemp's behalf. Congressmen complained to the *Journal*'s news staff that Wanniski had threatened editorial censure if they voted no. The dual role infuriated the newsies. The *Journal*'s then-executive editor Warren Phillips, warned Wanniski to desist his political activities. He didn't. At a commuter train station in New Jersey, Wanniski handed out pamphlets endorsing the candidacy of another of his protégés, Jeff Bell, for the United States Senate. One of the commuters, Phillips's deputy, Ray Shaw, saw him. That ended Wanniski's

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tenure at the *Journal.* The incident was quintessentially Wanniskiesque, demonstrating his naïveté and commitment. Even after ascending to one of journalism's most powerful perches, writing a book and advising powerful congressmen, Wanniski was willing to risk his job to engage in the classic democratic act of pamphleteering.

The pattern has repeated itself throughout his career. The same gregarious, forthright certitude that propels Wanniski into the corridors of power betrays and banishes him later. After a brief stint advising Ronald Reagan in 1980, Wanniski could not help but elucidate to the press—in a straight interview, not anonymous leaking—the importance of keeping the candidate's mind free of the doubts whispered by non-supply-side advisers, and of course Wanniski's own role in this struggle. Reagan's furious staff quickly cast him out. By 1996, with Kemp not running for president, Wanniski had maneuvered himself nearly entirely out of influence. He had managed a short, weak interest in Bob Dole, but Dole was not a zealot's man; Wanniski deserted him for publicly questioning tax cutting in 1995. The brief candidacy of supply-side publishing heir Steve Forbes provided a last gasp of power in (more or less) mainstream politics, with Wanniski joyfully propagandizing on Forbes's behalf. Wanniski not only devised the Forbes candidacy; politically speaking, he devised Forbes himself. Every thought to which Forbes gave breath had been hatched in Wanniski's mind. But Wanniski's old penchant for the impolitic did him in fairly soon. After Wanniski responded to Christian Coalition attacks on Forbes with a broadside against Ralph Reed—political suicide in the Republican primaries—campaign manager Bill Dal Col repudiated Wanniski and shut him out of the headquarters.

Once Dole added Kemp to the ticket and endorsed a tax cut, Wanniski happily joined his old pupil's camp. But the campaign blamed Wanniski for continuing friction between the two candidates. Kemp refused to perform the customary vice presidential role of pit bull, lest it distract from his tax-cut proselytizing; why quibble over FBI files when you've discovered the key to eternal bliss? During the convention, Kemp resisted touting the tax cut's individual savings. He didn't want to reduce a noble idea to tawdry vote-buying. For the pragmatists, of course, vote-buying was the point.

The cynicism of Wanniski's Republican allies has always made his standing within the party fragile. Twenty years after publishing Wanniski, Irving Kristol confessed in *The Public Interest* that his support for supply-side economics had no bearing in conviction: "The task, as I saw it, was to create ... a Republican majority—so political effectiveness was the priority, not the accounting deficiencies of government." Kristol's son, Bill, began tormenting Wanniski in the *Standard* only after founding a small outfit called Project for the Republican Future. Bill Kristol, like Wanniski, devoted himself to faxing advice to powerful Republicans. But, while Wanniski rambled on about monetary policy and the evils of taxing capital gains, Kristol's faxes focused on tactics to the complete exclusion of moral considerations. One memo famously urged the GOP to reject a health care bill "sight unseen" on the grounds that successful reform would help Democrats. Kristol, in short, would not be caught dead pamphleting train commuters in New Jersey.

Wanniski's systematic alienation from the party professionals during the last election has brought him perilously close to political oblivion. Virtually no politician besides Kemp takes him seriously any longer. If Kemp becomes president, Wanniski will be the most powerful man in America who is not president. But if, as seems fairly likely, Kemp does not become president, Wanniski will suffer the indignities heaped upon less fortunate cranks, those whose fevered missives to politicians and journalists procure impersonal letters penned by snickering interns.

Such a fate doesn't faze Wanniski; nothing can shake his cheerful conviction that he is absolutely right about absolutely everything, and that one day the world will see that. Interviewing Wanniski for this article, I asked him about his relationship with the right-wing conspiratorialist Lyndon LaRouche. Most people in politics would play down that sort of acquaintanceship. Wanniski happily detailed his efforts to settle his differences with LaRouche through a series of dinner meetings, monomaniac à monomaniac. "The Laffer Curve essentially is what differentiated us," he reports. In other words, the two failed to reach agreement on just one issue, a question on which LaRouche was actually *less* crazy than Wanniski.

Wanniski is so blessedly, nuttily, sure of himself that he can afford to forgive his critics with a blanket magnanimity that others in politics could only envy. Shortly before this article was written, a Wanniski memo to the editor came in over the fax machine. It seemed clear, the memo said, that the article's author had already "made up his mind before he called to develop a Farrakhan-LaRouche-Wanniski fruitcake story." Never mind, though, Wanniski wrote: "I want you to know in advance that I forgive you both for whatever polemics are produced at TNR."

And, in the end, the great joke is that Wanniski's not crazy to act this way. Wanniski is right about his place in history. After all, his theories continue to influence even those Republicans who think he's off his rocker. Wanniski's nemesis, the *Standard,* defended Dole's supply-side tax cut by relying on the theories Wanniski pioneered. The Republican Party today harbors no forthright opposition to supply-side tax cutting—just varying degrees of fervor. The only countervailing force on the right, budget balancing, itself derives from Wanniski: if the supply-siders hadn't done to the federal deficit in the late 1970s and early 1980s what they did, the budget hawks of the 1990s would have no reason to exist. The only two economic ideas that matter today both owe their existence to a man who his own party now acknowledges to be a nut. But it's too late. The nut's won. •

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THE HARD QUESTIONS

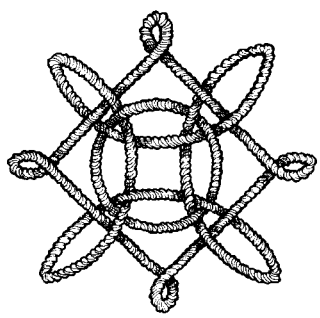
Ewegenics

For a change, there was no waffling. The president acted decisively and boldly, and, what's more, rightly, when he called for a moratorium on all cloning experiments involving humans. The alarm and moral clarity behind the president's action, however, has been absent in much of the media. The newspapers' ubiquitous search for "balance" is unbalanced when the matter at hand is as extraordinarily unsettling as cloning. I read a half-dozen pieces pairing a techno-enthusiast against a hand-wringing theologian. A professional ethicist is usually brought onstage as an arbiter between two obviously one-sided points of view. A comforting sense of moderation is achieved. The article ends.

But listen to the radio call-in shows and you get a rather different picture. For every wild-eyed optimist there are, by my count, a good half-dozen alarmists. Talk to the man and woman on the street and you hear murmurs and rumblings and dark portents of the "end-of-times" and "now we've gone too far." The airwaves and the street win this one hands down. They represent a humane and sobering contrast to the celebratory glitz of, say, *USA Today*, which trumpeted "HELLO DOLLY!"—the name of the fetching ewe staring at us in a front-page color photo. The sub-head read: "SHEEP CLONING PROMPTS ETHICAL DEBATE." The sheep looks perfectly normal, of course, and not terribly exercised about her historic significance. That she is the child of no one will probably not haunt her nights and days. But we—we humans, that is—should be haunted, by Dolly and all the Dollies to come and by the prospect others will appear on this earth as the progeny of our omnipotent striving, our yearning to create without pausing to reflect on what we are simultaneously destroying.

A few nights ago, I watched the Chicago Bulls clobber the San Antonio Spurs. Michael Jordan performed one of his typically superhuman feats, an assist that suggested he had eyes in the back of his head and two sets of arms. To one citizen who called a local program, the prospect of "more Michael Jordans" made the whole "cloning thing" not only palatable but desirable. "Can you imagine a whole basketball team of Michael Jordans?" he asked giddily.

Unfortunately, I can. It's a nightmare. If there were basketball teams fielding Jordans against Jordans, we wouldn't be able to recognize the one, the only, Michael Jordan. It's like suggesting that forty Mozarts are better than one. There would be no Mozart if there were forty Mozarts. We know the singularity of the one, the extraordinary genius—a Jordan, a Mozart—because they stand apart from and above the rest. Absent that irreducible singularity, their gifts and glorious accomplishments would mean nothing. They would be the norm, commonplace: another dunk, another concerto. In fact, lots of callers made this point, or one similar to it, in reacting to the Michael Jordan Clonetopia scenario.



A research librarian at a small college in Indiana, who had given me a drive to her campus for the purpose of delivering a lecture, offered a spontaneous, sustained and troubling critique of cloning that rivals the best dystopian fictions. Her cloning nightmare was a veritable army of Hitlers, ruthless and remorseless bigots who kept reproducing themselves until they had finished what the historic Hitler had failed to do: annihilate us. It occurred to me that an equal number of Mother Teresas would probably not be a viable deterrent, not if the Hitler clones were behaving like, well, Hitler.

But I had my own nightmare scenario: a society that clones human beings to serve as spare parts for the feeble. Because the cloned entities are not fully human, our moral queasiness is somewhat disarmed. We could then "harvest" organs to our heart's content—organs from human beings of every age, race and phenotype. Anencephalic newborns, whose organs are now "harvested," would, in that world, be the equivalent of the Model T—an early and, it turns out, very rudimentary prototype of glorious, gleaming things to come.

Far-fetched? No longer. Besides, the far-fetched often gets us nearer to the truth than the cautious, persnickety pieces that fail to come anywhere close to the pity and terror this topic evokes.

Consider Stanislaw Lem's science fiction classic *The Star Diaries*, in which his protagonist, Ijon Tichy, described as a "hapless Candide of the Cosmos," ventures into space and encounters one weird situation after another. Lem's "Thirteenth Voyage" takes Tichy to a planet called Panta, where he runs afoul of local custom and is accused of the worst of crimes, "the crime of personal differentiation." The evidence against him is incriminating. Nonetheless, Tichy is given an opportunity to conform. A planet spokesman instructs Tichy on the benefits of his planet, on which there are no separate entities—"only the collective."

The denizens of Panta have come to understand that the source of all "the cares, sufferings and misfortunes to which beings, gathered together in societies, are prone" lies in the individual, "in his private identity." The individual, by contrast to the collective, is "characterized by uncertainty, indecision, inconsistency of action, and above all—by impermanence." Having "completely eliminated individuality," the people of planet Panta have achieved "the highest degree of social interchangeability." It works rather the way the Marxist utopia was to function: everyone at any moment can be anything else. Functions or roles are commutable. On Panta you occupy a role for twenty-four hours only: one day a gardener, the next an engineer, then a mason, now a judge.

The same principle holds with families. "Each is composed of relatives—there's a father, mother, children. Only the functions remain constant; the ones who perform them are changed every day." All feelings and emotions are entirely abstract. One never needs to grieve or to mourn as everyone is infinitely replaceable. "Affection, respect, love were at one time gnawed by constant anxiety, by the fear of losing the person held dear," Lem writes. "This dread we have conquered. For in point of fact whatever upheavals, diseases or calamities may be visited upon us, we shall always have a father, a mother, a spouse and children." Indeed, there is no "I." And there can be no death, "where there are no individuals." In this commutable void, we do not die. Tichy, like most of us, can't quite get with the program. Brought before a court, he is "found guilty and condemned to life identification." He blasts off and sets his course for Earth.

Only this time, if Lem were writing an addendum to his brilliant tale, Tichy would probably land on terra firma—in both the literal and metaphorical sense—only to discover the greeting party at the rocket-port a bit strange: there are forty very tall basketball players all wearing identical #23 jerseys, dribbling on one side and, on the other side, forty men in powdered wigs, suited up in breeches and satin frock coats, all playing *The Marriage of Figaro*.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Scanning Cultures

A film from a strange place, if it's any good at all, brings three benefits. First, like every good film, its people and story are engaging. Next, it functions as travelogue, a valuable function as long as the first one isn't scanted. Not just scenery: it's strangely reassuring to see that babies bawl and girls giggle and boys strut in that far-off place, too. Third—again if number one is satisfactory—it makes us wonder about the culture that produced this film. **A Mongolian Tale** (New Yorker) does just well enough with Number One to make Numbers Two and Three register.

The film was made in Outer Mongolia by a Chinese director, Xie Fei, with a Chinese crew and Mongolian actors. The story was adapted from his own novel by Zhang Cheng-zhi, who was exiled from China to Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution and was much impressed by the simple lives of the people he met there. (The ill wind blew some good.) A Mongolian man, living out on the steppes, gets a city job and leaves his small son in the charge of a kindly old woman who is raising a small granddaughter. The boy and the girl grow up in this quasi-nomadic shepherd's world—they all move twice a year to follow the grass. Romantic and other complications follow between the boy and girl as they grow. The boy, now a youth, leaves. When the youth is a man, he returns, having become a well-known singer in the Mongolian world, to find the girl-woman is a wife and mother. Bittersweet tears flow.

The story is just sufficiently interesting to serve as a vehicle for the real protagonist, the cinematographer, Fu Jingsheng. The sweep of the enormous landscape—we can almost feel the wind—is awesome as Fu renders it, not so much beautiful as sobering. Fu's camera dramatizes the treasure of human contact in the midst of the vastness, with a difference from the American west. Our west, for historical reasons, was always seen as a challenge: the grand Mongolian space is an acceptance, has been so for many centuries.

This leads to Number Three. What about the culture that produced the film? As for the Chinese artists and artisans behind the camera, we know something by this time about their provenance; but what about the Mongolian actors, all of whom are good? Where and how did they become actors? (I except the children. Always, everywhere, child actors are either spontaneously good or hopeless.) We're told that Dogolesurong, who plays the grandmother, is "one of Outer Mongolia's top actresses." If we weren't so ignorant, we wouldn't think that statement funny. Naranhuar, who plays the young woman, was born in a Mongolian family, has acted much in Chinese film and theater and TV, has studied and taught in Beijing and London, has worked for the BBC and currently lives in London. To play her role here, her first in Mongolian, she had to recover her first language. Tengger, who plays the young man, is a composer and singer who has put out five albums in Mongolia.

Still, even without these data, the viewer sees that this film provides an aperture into an ancient culture, unfamiliar to most of us. The "Mongolian tale" itself is more lachrymose than moving, but it's enough of a story to bring us this place and some of its people.

On the other hand, **Donnie Brasco** (Tristar) is set on familiar turf with mostly familiar people—Mafia doings in Manhattan. The screenplay by Paul Attanasio derives from the adventures of Joseph D. Pistone, an FBI agent who penetrated the Mafia ranks and ferreted out enough material to secure over 100 convictions. Presumably the facts of the story are accurate, though it's hard to understand why the Wise Guys didn't investigate Donnie Brasco (Pistone's Mafia name) more thoroughly. When they were considering him for membership, why didn't they have him tailed? They would have seen him visiting his Pistone family.

Johnny Depp plays Donnie and, as a Christopher Walken wannabe, is more vital than usual. The real interest, however, is in Al Pacino, as the Mafia soldier who, after some testing, sponsors Donnie's acceptance and is thus responsible for him. For once, the focus of a Mafia film is mostly on a laborer in the ranks—a killer, with twenty-six hits to his credit, yet after all these years still just a low-income laborer. The role is certainly not hard for Pacino, but he doesn't loaf in it: he becomes an employee whose cosmos is the company he works for and the bosses above him—and whose fate hangs

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Designated Mourner. *Wallace Shawn's extraordinary theater piece, presented by the camera. Three speakers sit at a table and, by recounting their fates, recount the political and cultural decline of an epoch. Chief of the three exceptional speakers: Mike Nichols. (Yes, that Mike Nichols.) (Reviewed 3/24/97)* **Hamlet.** *Kenneth Branagh, a generally fine company, the full text. Occasionally too clever, but electric. (1/27/97)* **Prisoner of the Mountains.** *Tolstoi's tale of the Caucasus, deftly updated, keenly directed and acted to bring out the moving moral drama. (2/24/97)* **Sling Blade.** *Wretched title for a deeply poignant work—written and directed by Billy Bob Thornton, the leading actor. In Arkansas, a man, after spending twenty-five years in a mental hospital because he murdered, tries the world again. (2/10/97)*—**SK**

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on the loyalty of the man he brings into the group.

The director was an Englishman, Mike Newell, whose last film was *Four Weddings and a Funeral.* Here the funerals predominate. Newell has made a lot of very English pictures, including a neglected gem, *The Good Father,* with Anthony Hopkins. With *Donnie Brasco,* more than his venue has changed. Examples abound of films made by directors far from their native heaths. What sometimes helps them is what apparently helped Newell here: familiarity with previous films in the genre. By now there is a directorial ritual for Mafia film almost as venerable and fixed as the ritual for Chinese drama; Newell knows that ritual and uses it adequately. The film's real novelty is its sociological focus on a Mafia prole.

We're told that, on the evening of February 23, 65 million people watched the NBC broadcast of *Schindler's List.* There were only two brief interruptions—noncommercial intermissions—one more break than would anyway be needed to play the two tapes of the film at home. Whatever the reasons for Ford's sponsorship, it's impossible to see the event as anything other than gratifying.

We're also told that fewer than sixty seconds were cut from the film. Although this was my fourth time with it, I couldn't perceive what was cut. Anyway, a note at the beginning of the broadcast mentioned the abridgement—a trifling amount, as it turned out. But that note also mentioned that the film had been formatted for TV. This was not a trifle. It was highly regrettable.

Steven Spielberg and his cinematographer, Janusz Kaminski, envisioned every image of this film, every frame, in widescreen form. My tape of *Schindler's List* is the "letterboxed" edition. A label says: "To preserve the artistic integrity intended by the filmmakers, this film is presented on videocassette in the original theatrical screen image." Wouldn't that integrity have been appropriate for the enormous TV audience—almost three times the number of Americans who had previously seen the film in theaters? A word at the start could have explained the narrow black band at the top and bottom of the screen, and the reason for them. This would have taken care of the matter just as easily as it does for VCR users. And the images of this film, made with breathtaking cinematic mastery, calibrated for intimacy and immensity, would have been honored.

Not many of those 65 million will forget what they saw; all the more fervently, I wish they had seen it in its true form. •

Jed Perl on Art

Cloudy and Cooler

Giambattista Tiepolo is a master of whirling crescendos, heaped-on-high clouds and feet-first somersaulting angels. He has the painterly gifts to describe anything, from the gleaming highlights on embroidered cloth to heavenly vistas raked by golden light. This virtuosic eighteenth-century artist brings such seductively elegant effects to so many areas of a painting, and works in so many grace notes and flourishes, that you can go a little crazy just trying to take it all in.

Tiepolo's art is all movement, no climax. That is its essential charm for some and its gravest flaw for others, myself included. How you respond to Tiepolo depends on how you feel about bravura showmanship in painting. This season museumgoers in New York have a wonderful opportunity to make up their minds for themselves, because the artist, his gifted son Domenico and many of their fellow eighteenth-century Venetians are receiving a luminous presentation in four exhibitions spread through two New York institutions. Tiepolo is a painter whose full accomplishment cannot be measured without considering the vast frescoes that he produced in Italy, Germany and Spain, but Keith Christiansen, the Jayne Wrightsman Curator in the Department of European Paintings at the Metropolitan, has managed to bring together an exhibition at the museum that does justice to many of the high points of Tiepolo's vast pink-and-blond-and-gold universe. The Metropolitan has taken advantage of the occasion to dig deep into its own holdings. Linda Wolk-Simon has organized a beautiful show devoted to Domenico, and Suzanne Boorsch has put together an excellent survey of eighteenth-century Venetian prints and illustrated books. Concurrently, fifty blocks south, the Pierpont Morgan Library is presenting (in collabo-

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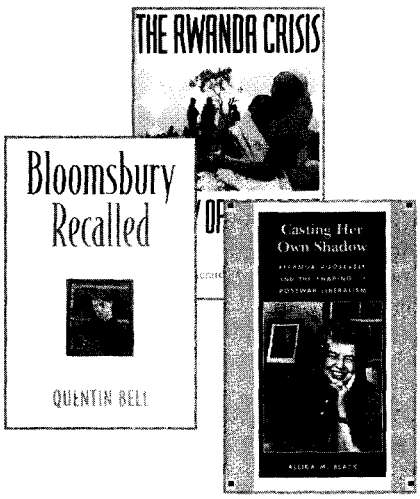

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ration with the Harvard University Art Museums) a show of drawings by "Tiepolo and his Circle," organized by the Dutch scholar Bernard Aikema.

No artists have been more keenly attuned to the visual beauties of their native haunts than the Venetians, and as you go through this quartet of shows the Venetian background comes to the fore. For hundreds of years before Tiepolo became the dominant force in art in Venice, painters and printmakers were filling their works with impressions of the city's art and architecture, skies and canals, precious silks and velvets and shimmering colored glass. So much so that by Tiepolo's time the Venetian artist's relation to his hometown was like an adventure in a house of mirrors. The exhibition of prints and illustrated books at the Met includes, of course, some of Canaletto's etchings, with their surfaces of rippling black lines that create an effect as fine as silk moiré. Canaletto shows the ordinary life of a great metropolis, but he brings such geometric flair to his renderings of even the most disheveled neighborhoods that each battered shutter and roof tile seems to be encoded with the classical values of the Renaissance.

The eighteenth century was the once-more-with-feeling age in Venetian art. Centuries before, Carpaccio, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, and Veronese had given the pomp and circumstance of the Venetian Republic a naturalistic sizzle, and now Tiepolo looked back and revived that dashingly formal vision. Venice was politically weak in Tiepolo's day, but its sense of authority lived on as a pictorial idea that Tiepolo exported to princes in Germany and, ultimately, to the King of Spain. Much of what he did not literally paint on European walls is gathered together at the Metropolitan. There are saints and madonnas, stories from the Old and New Testaments, myths adapted from Ovid, love stories from Tasso and endless allegorical extravaganzas. Certainly, Tiepolo constructs a believable world. He knows how to assemble the actors, and he has all the details in place. What's missing is the old Venetian density and weight. Despite the golden light, there's a chill in the air.

When Tiepolo died in 1770 in Madrid, where he had gone to work for Charles III, he took with him the secrets of Europe's last great courtly art, with its elegant pageantry and studied opulence. That dynamic yet absolutist vision still has a hold on people, as you can see from the volume of publications and exhibitions that has led up to and now accompanies the 300th anniversary of his birth, in 1696. A decade ago Michael Levey published a substantial, engaging biographical study. In 1993, the Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth mounted a show of the oil sketches. The next year, Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, two art historians who are not Venetian specialists but are known for breaking ground, published *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* (Yale). It's a challenging interpretation of Tiepolo's largest ceiling, in the Prince-Bishop's palace at Würzburg, which, at 19 by 30 meters, is said to be the largest painting in Europe. In 1996, that ceiling was the subject of an exhibition that brought together a large number of preparatory drawings.

Courtesy Duchesa de Villahermosa, Pedrola

THE ANNUNCIATION, C. 1765-70

And now the Tiepolo retrospective, which opened in Venice last fall, is at the Metropolitan.

Tiepolo's work exudes a suave equanimity that can leave you somewhat unprepared for the vehemence of his admirers. They don't just like Tiepolo's work; they see it as a cause, and they're going into battle for it. At the beginning of the Metropolitan's show, there is a wall text that urges us to "leave behind ... our arbitrary categories of decorative and serious." I assume that those words come from Keith Christiansen. I agree with him that decorative style is a serious matter; but Tiepolo's work rather reinforces those conventional categories because, no matter how hard he tries, he can't get his beguiling structures to support much emotional weight. Tiepolo achieves a magnificently easygoing kind of decorative theatricality, but the people who are most enthusiastic about the work can't leave well enough alone. They see something in Tiepolo, and they want to turn that something into everything. They resent the thought that Tiepolo is no Veronese, and so they up the ante: in that same text on the wall at the Metropolitan, Tiepolo is compared to Bach. A lot of art historians sound downright defensive when they insist on seeing Tiepolo's boldly assured style as profound.

In their book about the Würzburg ceiling, Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall argue that what is generally accepted or rejected as princely décor ought to be understood as a searching exploration of the very nature of what they call "pictorial intelligence." They take us into Tiepolo's dizzy heavens, pay close attention to the piled-up allegorical depictions of the four continents that ring the huge Würzburg space, and celebrate the way that Tiepolo continually engages our attention and makes us feel "active physically, restless optically, un-passionately curious." Theirs is a kinetic-formalist reading. It's great fun to read a book by historians who have such marvelous intuitions, but eventually I get the uncomfortable feeling that their intellectual playfulness has taken on a life of its own. Perhaps their technique matches Tiepolo's. They love to

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figure out what he's doing, and the description of stage effects becomes the discovery of meaning.

Everybody who admires Tiepolo wants to attest to the emotional impact of his amusingly inventive spirit. In his own time a writer named Bernardo Ziliotti observed that "his paintings are true magic and his inventions are outside of nature, and there is not a single thing expressed by this fine sensibility that does not bring with it novel figures and color." In the catalog of the Metropolitan show, Keith Christiansen continues in this vein when he argues that Tiepolo's "modernity" rests in the way he "continually plays off the world of the imagination against the world of nature." When you look at Tiepolo's work you invariably get caught up in that dialectical pressure, which might also be described as a tension between surface and substance, and perhaps your feelings about this artist ultimately have a lot to do with how much of that sort of mental gymnastics you like to have filling your mind as you look at a painting. Tiepolo's essential theatricality is not in dispute. Everybody agrees that he cultivates bizarre vantage points, and that in the midst of the weightiest religious subjects he will introduce mysterious, oddly costumed observers. But I think that what some viewers report as a visceral reaction to those theatrical gambits can be more accurately described as their intellectual pride in knowing what he's up to.

At the Metropolitan, Christiansen has filled a long gallery with dashingly dramatic altarpieces and some other religious paintings, which date from the 1740s to the 1760s. This is the curator's most sustained demonstration of the idea that Tiepolo is an emotional heavyweight. There is no disputing that Tiepolo invents some vivid protagonists, such as Saint Gaetano da Thiene, with his wild-eyed good looks, and the blond Saint Lucy, who is both touchingly fragile and seductively lush. Tiepolo knows how to set the compositions into motion around these actors; he can build a dynamic space within the rather contained vertical configuration of an altarpiece.

But there is almost too much panache to these suavely rendered dramas. Christiansen argues that Saint Gaetano's "firm features and alert posture, his plain clerical garb and brightly polished shoes testify to his determination and practicality—this is no bland, idealized vision of holiness." Although that's probably an accurate account of Tiepolo's intentions, I think that Christiansen is bringing us right back to an older complaint against

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the artist, which is that Tiepolo makes us almost uncomfortably aware of each of his brilliant moves.

Tiepolo produces showstoppers, especially the heartrending, pale-as-death Saint Agatha, an early Christian martyr who is shown just after the executioner has mutilated her chest. In the catalog, Christiansen draws our attention to the unadorned realism of Saint Agatha's face. Certainly Tiepolo wants to evoke a moment of pain turning into transcendence, but I find that the face is more of a masterly demonstration than a flashing intuition. Christiansen compares the Saint Agatha to works by Bernini and Rubens. I can't see the resemblance. Tiepolo never reaches the point that we're familiar with in those greatest of Baroque masters, where the emotions get ahead of the technique and the artist is allowing himself to go out of control.

You feel the limits of Tiepolo's art in the way that he deals with color. He's a singular colorist who can achieve remarkable overall light-filled effects without sacrificing the specifics. His juxtapositions of yellows and grays are peerless. Yet he lacks entirely the greatest Venetian gift, which is to create a rhythmical color movement through the entire composition that gives emotional density to particular areas. The truth is that by the eighteenth century the secret of transcendent color had left Venice for Paris, where it burned bright in the immortal improvisations of Watteau.

Christiansen has wisely grouped Tiepolo's works thematically within a larger chronological arrangement. He has been able to demonstrate that certain subjects and approaches remain fairly constant over a long period of time. I like the laying-down-the-gauntlet drama of that big gallery of religious works, even if I'm not caught up in the paintings. Later the show loses focus, in several rooms devoted to mythological subjects that are lightweight and mannered. Then, just when a museumgoer's mind is really starting to wander, there are Tiepolo's winningly peculiar etchings, the *Capricci* and the *Scherzi*, in which a fascinatingly weird cast of characters is as casually arranged as the figures in Picasso's Rose period impressions of itinerant circus troupes.

Tiepolo's prints can stop you in your tracks, because they strike such a daringly idiosyncratic note. Tiepolo certainly knew how to achieve improvisational freedom within the highly structured schemes of his major commissions, but even so it's something of a surprise to find him playing with motifs as intuitively as he does in these variations-on-a-theme prints. He seems to be obsessed with his small, oddly assorted cast of characters, which includes a well-padded gentleman with a huge beard and an exotic turban, some women who have the imperious elegance of classical muses, a few soldiers and one or two naked youths. Sometimes Tiepolo's wanderers are gathered around an old tomb or other classical ruin, and they appear to be contemplating their own mortality, like the figures in Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*. In one or another etching there's an hourglass or a few bones that emphasize the *momento mori* theme, but in other prints it's not so easy to see what's on everybody's mind. Of course, allegorical enigmas are an old story in Venetian art, going back to Giorgione's *Tempest* and the woodcut illustrations to the fifteenth-century love fantasy called the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, but in Tiepolo's prints, with their owls and heaped trophies, the whole allegorical tradition seems to be fermenting, turning from obscure emblems into inscrutable dreams. We're moving into Goya's universe—which makes sense, since Goya admired Tiepolo's work.

In these prints, Tiepolo's gift for elegant elaboration takes on a dramatic life of its own. Here, and in his smaller painted studies, Tiepolo seems to be tickled by his own virtuosity. Museumgoers find his sense of fun infectious, and, although I'm not always swept off my feet, I would not exactly disagree. Tiepolo is certainly one of Europe's very greatest masters of the telegraphic brushstroke, which so often reaches perfection at the end of a grand tradition, when all the underpinnings are thoroughly assimilated and the artist becomes a mesmerist who evokes rather than describes. Tiepolo's painterly virtuosity is impressive in big compositions all through the show, but it is simply astonishing in his drawings and oil studies, where dauntingly complicated groups of figures are summoned up with peremptory ease. At the Morgan Library there are a couple of walls of drawings in pen and ink, with fast-moving lines accented by broad washes, that achieve breathtaking luxury through bare-bones means. It's in these drawings that Tiepolo gives his extravagant inventions a bit of the simplicity that we know from Bernini.

Tiepolo's strokes sometimes have a slightly jagged attack, and, when he uses this type of brushwork to fill a few square feet, the result is an amusing, jittery, knockabout ease. Tiepolo lays in vast golden cloud banks with a few passes of the brush and then indicates half a dozen cavorting *putti* in some dashes of a darker tone. The approach, which is surely most familiar in the studies for vast ceilings, is sustained in a series of cabinet-sized paintings that he did right at the end of his life. Here his genre-like approach to religious themes suggests some of the coziness of fifteenth-century painting. He paints a surprisingly arranged, unprepossessing *Annunciation* and some romantically casual scenes of the *Flight into Egypt*. The actors are still his elegant, head-held-high types, but the drama has a domestic intimacy and wit. Tiepolo is in a let's-try-it mood; he seems to have nothing on his mind except pleasing himself.

In these smaller formats, Tiepolo's freedom of invention is marvelously engaging, but I think that the lightness of the paintings also reflects the wandering attention of an artist who always had bigger projects in mind. There's an engine running in the smaller works that can't be contained within their dimensions. Tiepolo is always reaching. To survey the shows that are now in New York is to have forcibly brought to mind the staggering productivity of a great studio in an age when painters were still expected to finish what architects had begun. There are the seemingly endless preparatory drawings, the elaborate oil sketches, the full-size works and the drawings and prints that were later done as records of those paintings. Reading about Tiepolo, you see what it took to bring off so many major commissions: the juggling of schedules, since on account of the weather certain kinds of work could only be done at certain times of year; the commissions outside Venice that necessitated stays of months and years and the transport of much studio paraphernalia. In traditional Venetian fashion, Tiepolo brought his sons into the business, and one of them, Domenico, became a seamless executant of his father's style, so much so that it's sometimes difficult to say who did what.

Domenico was a devoted child who also became an original in his own right, and a moving aspect of the Tiepolo family story is the son's discovery of an individual sensibility in the midst of his father's overwhelming example. Linda Wolk-Simon's excellent catalog for the Metropolitan's Domenico show (it's the current issue of the museum's bulletin) relates the situation with energy and lucidity. Domenico evolved his own delightfully earthbound universe in scores of frescoes, oil paintings and drawings. He gave the aristocrats, working people and *commedia dell'arte* figures of his world a poignant yet comic gravity. One of his specialties was groups of figures seen from the back, so that as we look

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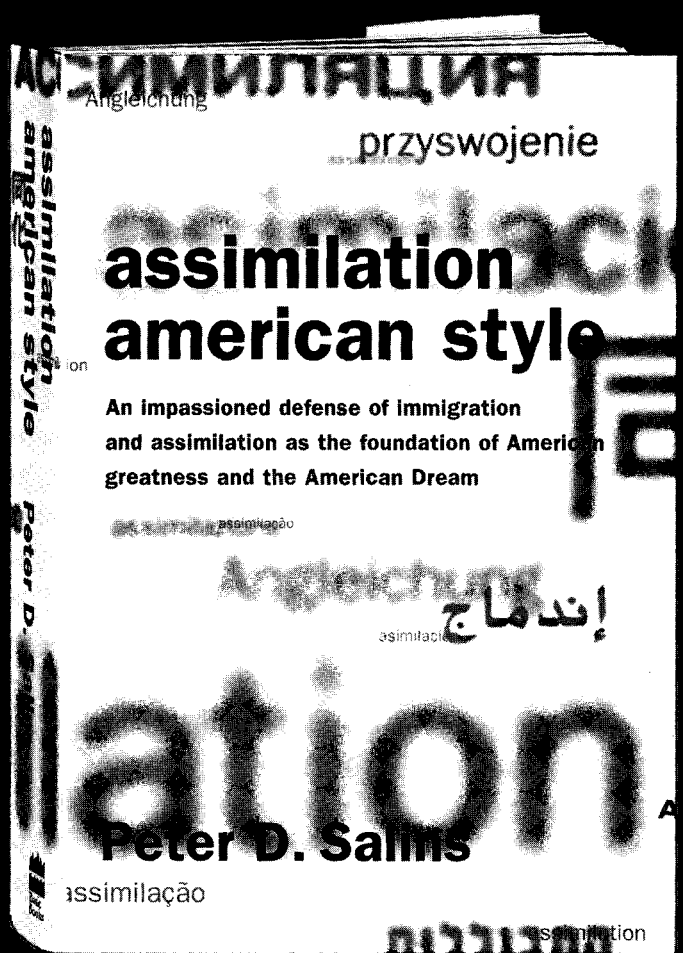
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we experience a peculiar mix of frustrated curiosity and voyeuristic thrill.

The most famous of Domenico's motifs is known as *The New World* or *The Prep Show*. This composition exists in two fresco versions, one of which is now in the Ca' Rezzonico in Venice. It is carnival time, and the crowd of masked revelers and vendors and passersby has been attracted by something that we can only just make out because their backs are in the way. The crowd is watching a magic lantern show, but for us the painting is about watching them. Domenico has brought his father's startling heavenly perspectives down to earth: the Age of Realism has begun. Domenico died in 1804, and in his finest paintings the airy infinities that his father summoned up shrink to wedges of space. Still, in his drawings, many of which are in the Metropolitan, the staggering productivity of the family lives on. Domenico filled endless sheets with cavorting punchinellos, and the spectacle of all these baggy nudniks running riot through piazzas and salons provides a slapstick finale to the Venetian pageant.

Even here, in the work that Domenico was doing at the very end of his life, you feel the profligate virtuosity of eighteenth-century Venice, which Giambattista had taken further than anyone else in his crazily vast ceilings. So far as technique was concerned, there was nothing that Giambattista Tiepolo could not do. He is, I think, a painter who shows us the limits of a perfect technique. Nowadays there is a tendency to make too much of his virtuosity, and that may reflect a more general assumption that nothing is beyond your reach if you have the technical know-how. Would that it were so. Tiepolo is a giant, but a limited giant. The work flows too well. The greatest masters are more awkward, more unnerved by their efforts to push further. Tiepolo's technique was so insistently transparent that its very fluency became opaque. He held a polished mirror up to a world that, no matter how much sun he splashed across those fast-moving skies of his, was turning cloudy and cooler. •

Dating Your Dad

BY JAMES WOLCOTT

The Kiss
by Kathryn Harrison

(Random House, 207 pp., $20)

Remember when it took some digging to unearth secrets? When guilt and repression were still powerful enforcers? In the aftermath of Freud and Jung, the unconscious seemed like a rich treasure bed, a sunken Atlantis of racial myth and murky memories, a crumbling Edgar Allan Poe estate choked with moss. To read one of Freud's case studies is to descend a spiral staircase where steps are broken or missing, dreams contain puns, and puns yield clues to primal events, usually involving some sexual eye-popper. However mistaken Freud's treatment may have been of "Dora" and the "Wolf Man," his case studies survive as detective literature, owing to the ingenious brainwork that he lavished against his patients' resistance. An element of play, a dogged glee, peeps through his struggle to free them of their fetters. In his analysis of "Dora," Freud modestly denied that he employed magical technique. Unlocking secrets was mostly a matter of being receptive, he claimed.

> He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. And thus the task of making conscious the most hidden recesses of the mind is one which it is quite possible to accomplish.

Now the problem is the opposite: getting people to put a cork in it. What was once quite possible to accomplish has become impossible to stop. Since the 1970s, the deluge of pop-psych best-sellers, celebrity confessionals and tabloid talk shows has made Freud's intellectual heavy-lifting seem as antiquated as washing by hand. Even our deepest, darkest secrets seem shallow now—easy pickings. Our once-hidden shames have become publicity hounds. It's as if our psyches are no longer labyrinths or flooded basements, but well-lit TV studios where we swivel in the guest chair, awaiting our cue. The recent rash of personal memoirs and autobiographical novels (*Bastard Out of Carolina*, *The Liars' Club*, *Drinking: A Love Story*, *The Blue Suit*, *Prozac Nation*, *Autobiography of a Face*) bear witness to this desire to shop one's pain in plain sight. Some memoir-writers are legitimately trying to clarify for themselves and the reader the experience of a cruel upbringing or an unfortunate twist of fate; others are simply peddling their stories for fame. Either way, we're approaching saturation—agony overload. I have three writer-friends currently working on memoirs. This summer the Iowa Writing Series is offering a weeklong workshop in "the powerful form of crisis memoir," in which students are asked to bring manuscripts of their own "survival stories."

With so many memoirs covering so many addictions and afflictions, the confessions have gotten kinkier and more gossipy, as writers add extra salsa to stand out from the growing herd. In the last few years we've had Michael Ryan confess to molesting the family dog in *Secret Life*, Daphne Merkin getting spanked in *The New Yorker*, the English writer Blake Morrison describe getting an erection while putting his young daughter to bed in *As If* (her rounded buttocks, etc.); and soon we will have Naomi Wolf's *Promiscuities: An American Girlhood* and Katie Roiphe's memoir about her sister and drugs. But no crisis memoir has attracted more fireflies than Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss*. Prefaced with a quotation from François Mauriac (classy dead French writer), this is a book that gift wraps its sordid secret in a Tiffany box. It's incest with a twist, trash with a capital "T."

Harrison is the author of three novels, *Thicker than Water*, *Exposure* and *Poison*, along with numerous magazine articles about herself for *Vogue*. For one of the *Vogue* pieces, a testy complaint about being treated as a bimbo just because she happens to be blond ("as if ... in demonstrating both intelligence and blondness, I had broken some unspoken rule"), Harrison posed in fishnet stockings and a tacky dress slit thigh-high. The irony seemed lost on her. Her husband, Colin Harrison, is an editor at *Harper's* and the author of a breathless literary thriller called *Manhattan Nocturne*. He has also signed a reported million-dollar two-book deal. Their star-quality as a literary couple has made them attractive bait in the piranha tank of pop journalism.

Before the publication of *The Kiss*, Harrison granted interviews to *Mirabella* and *The New York Observer* and refused to talk to *Vanity Fair*, which ran an unsym-

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pathetic piece by Michael Shnayerson. Then the English press got into the act. Nearly every article mentioned that an excerpt from *The Kiss* was due to run in *The New Yorker*, a bona fide indicator of the book's "buzz" value. But then the excerpt was aborted, an ominous sign. All this preliminary fuss has made the Harrisons understandably wary, and not just because they seemed to have lost control of the hype.

"Literary" writers such as the Harrisons often grumble that in the current showbiz climate they are reviewed not for the content of their work or the craft of their prose, but on the basis of sidebar issues: the size of their advances, the parties they attend, even their looks. (In the '80s, Gordon Lish seemed to be running a modeling school out of Knopf.) Writers now have to fret about being fashionable enough for the fickle press, but not so trendy that they provoke a backlash. And, given the touchy subject matter of *The Kiss*, the Harrisons had even more cause to feel targeted. "Colin and Kathy understood from the beginning that the book was going to be a magnet for a lot of small-hearted speculation," the novelist Bob Shacochis told the *Observer*. So many meanies out there! Since we don't wish to appear small-hearted, let's humor Colin and Kathy (and Bob). For the first half of this review, let's make our minds a perfect blank and focus on the book itself, on the text. Let's pretend we stumbled on the work unawares.

The first thing that strikes one about *The Kiss* is how airbrushed the writing is, how fadeaway. Its sentences leave wistful little vapor trails of Valium. The opening chapter, a brief flash-forward that finds Harrison and her father journeying together out West, has the mock-simple rosary-bead rhythm of a Joan Didion litany. "We meet at airports. We meet in cities where we've never been before. We meet where no one will recognize us." The tourist spots that they visit have a movie-location desolation that's also Didionesque.

> Increasingly, the places we go are unreal places: the Petrified Forest, Monument Valley, the Grand Canyon—places as stark and beautiful and deadly as those revealed in satellite photographs of distant planets. Airless, burning, inhuman.

Posed in front of these supersized postcards from perdition, these two are ready for their close-ups: "Against such backdrops, my father takes my face in his hands. He tips it up and kisses my closed eyes, my throat." Back in the car, they quarrel and weep, going from motel to motel, lovers on the lam, worming through the dusty soul of America.

But if her father is a Humbert, his daughter is no Lolita. The shock revelation in *The Kiss*—and, presumably, its selling point—is that the father-daughter incest it recounts is not childhood exploitation, but a consensual act between two adults. It began when Harrison was 20, and old enough to know better. Harrison's father, a preacher, left home when Kathryn was only 6 months old, insisting later that he was driven away. (He remarried and started another family.) Kathryn was raised mostly by her mother's parents. It was tense around the house; when her mother went out on dates, her grandmother howled like an animal. When Kathryn was 6, her mother moved out of the house to a nearby apartment, depriving her of the presence of both parents. The anger and the resentment that Harrison feels toward her wayward mother is later manifested as anorexia.

> An uneasy relationship with food is the standard example in cases such as my mother's and mine. At fifteen, when I stop eating, is it because I want to secure her grudging admiration? Do I want to make myself smaller and smaller until I disappear, truly becoming my mother's daughter: the one she doesn't see?

Her father does see, and how. He sees from the depths of his muddled being. At the age of 20, Kathryn meets the father whom she has barely known in an awkward family reunion of which mother makes three. Her slatternly mother being chronically late, Kathryn meets her father alone at the airport terminal.

> "Don't move," he says. "Just let me look at you."
>
> My father looks at me, then, as no one has ever looked at me before. His hot eyes consume me—eyes that I will discover are always just this bloodshot. I almost feel their touch. He takes my hands, one in each of his, and turns them over, stares at my palms. He does not actually kiss them, but his look is one that ravishes.

Training his personal high-beams on her, his eyes "burn like no other eyes I've ever seen before or since. Burn like a prophet's, a madman's, a lover's." Shades of Fu Manchu! "Always shining, always bloodshot, always turned on me with absolute attention. Intelligent eyes, enraptured eyes, luminous, stricken, brilliant, spellbound, spellbinding eyes." Alright, already!

The affair begins days later, with their goodbye kiss at the airport terminal—a kiss that begins as a proper one on his part but becomes a Roto-Rooter tongue probe, "wet, insistent, exploring, then withdrawn." Stunned, she watches his plane take off, "the thrust that lifts its heavy, shining belly into the clouds," an image that you don't need to be Freud

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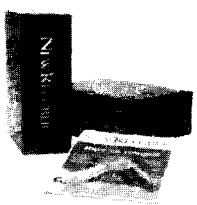

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to figure out. He bombards her with phone calls and letters, pleas to meet him. She shouldn't, she mustn't, but she must, she does. Soon they are saying goodbyes at different airports, which are yet all the same in their antiseptic dolor.

> Our protracted good-byes are consumed along with magazines and junk food by the weary, bored travelers who surround us, slumped in molded plastic chairs.
>
> Do we resemble each other enough that people suspect we're father and daughter? Do we sit too close to one another? Does his hand on my arm betray his intent? And why do we cling so, as if our parting will be as final as death?

At first surmise, Harrison's lapsing into an affair with her father seems a desperate attempt to sunbathe in the attention always denied her by her mother. ("Her eyes, when they turn at last toward me, are like two empty mirrors. I can't see myself in them.") It's also a sexual cat fight. When Harrison was in college, according to *The Kiss*, her mother insisted that she be fitted for a diaphragm and accompanied her to the gynecologist's examining room. The doctor informs them that the hymen needs to be broken before the fitting can be done. "You don't want me to do that, do you?" he asks. Yes, the mother says. And so, writes Harrison, "This doctor deflowers me in front of my mother," inserting one green dildo after another until there's blood.

It was the doctor's hand, but her mother's decision—her mother took her virginity. Thus Kathryn's affair with her father is a form of retaliation—a return jab. "Through my father I have begun at last to penetrate my mother, to tear away the masks that divide us." Her father is a stand-in for her mother; he has "disconcertingly visible" breasts and lovely feet. Though he may need one of those male bras from "Seinfeld" ("the mansièrre"), he's quite comfy in his flesh. Harrison: "For women like my mother and myself, careful listeners to society's normative messages of beauty and gender, a body such as my father's and his utter lack of self-consciousness over it are as subversive and disquieting as is his readiness to weep."

Bordering on camp, *The Kiss* is the oddest piece of kitsch, going from melodrama about hypnotic burning eyes to women's-magazine pap about "society's normative messages," from overblown omens ("every day the sun rises and sinks over the Grand Canyon, each time filling it with shadows the color of blood") to cardboard dialogue out of a drawing-room drama: "When I look at you," Harrison's father tells her, "I wonder if I, too, must not be handsome." (Take off your gloves, Count, and stay awhile.) Harrison's sentences carry a high instep as she treads through the fallen petals of her past. "The dizzy rapture of starving. The power of needing nothing. By force of will I will make myself the impossible sprite who lives on air, on water, on purity." It's bad Sylvia Plath.

Perhaps the passage that best captures the book's weird precocity comes when Harrison visits her grandfather (her father's father), and he, too, makes a pass at her. His pass deflected, gramps takes her on a tour of his greenhouse:

> The small glass structure is filled with color, as if every hue in this dry, gray city has been drawn into the vibrant box. In it, my grandfather is a magician, and his smile tells me he knows this. As I walk behind him and watch his hands gently turn a beautiful bloom toward my notice, do I remember the linguistic connection between orchids and male genitalia? Do I say the word silently to myself, *orchidectomy*, and define it as a surgical term for the removal of the testicles? I think, actually, that I do.

This book is so self-consciously writerly that when Harrison traps a cockroach under a glass we instantly grasp that this is no ordinary house bug, this is a metaphor for her condition. "I watch how it must relentlessly search for the seam, the tiny ridge or rill in the glass that might offer some hope of climbing, penetrating, escaping. But there is nothing about the glass that it understands." She, too, feels bewildered and trapped by transparent forces.

But it's one thing to be a small child at the mercy of adults, and another thing to be an adult participant yourself. Her father may have peppered her with wheedling phone calls and letters, but he wasn't looming at her bedroom door, taking advantage of his size and his age. Their affair wasn't a sordid domestic situation, it was a complex operation. She had to make travel arrangements to bunk with dad, then cover her tracks with lies. The conscious upkeep required for this relationship gets lost in the mental haze that Harrison maintains on the page. She sets the psychological framework for the incest, but she absents herself from the activity itself, depicting herself as a somnambulist, a white zombie.

When her father lifts her nightgown to perform cunnilingus (about as explicit as the book gets), Harrison disassociates from her body as the scene unfolds like some primitive rite. "Neither of us speaks, not even one word. The scene is as silent, as dark and dreamlike as if it proceeded from a fever or a drug." Over time, her mind erases the tapes. "In years to come, I won't be able to remember even one instance of our lying together. I'll have a composite, generic memory." It is true that childhood victims of sex abuse often reflect a mind-body split as a method of dealing with the trauma, but in this case you feel Harrison is doing an astral float in order to preserve some core of innocence. After all, if you're the glassy-eyed victim of a fever or a drug, you're not truly responsible for your actions; you're the victim, the pawn of outside agents. But Harrison speaks of "enchantment" and "enslavement," as if she were a fairy princess. The very title of *The Kiss* suggests that this is a Sleeping Beauty story—except in reverse, in which the kiss is not awakening but dumbfounding.

As the shame-spiral deepens, the sex becomes riskier, stagier, a sacred mortification of the flesh, with Kathryn and her father copulating on the floor of his church office. "I tell myself that if I give myself over to him to be sullied, then by the topsy-turvy Christian logic that exalts the reviled, I'll be made clean. I will if I can just do it willingly, trusting in the ultimate goodness of God, and the way in which he sometimes takes unexpected and even repugnant forms, like beggars and lepers, like Saint Dymphna's father. How could she have been martyred without him? How could she have been glorified?" The questions she ought to be asking at that moment are, "Suppose somebody catches us? How are we going to explain this?"

Real-life complications seldom impinge on the book's bummed-out fairy-tale trance. I found myself pondering the awful possibility of her becoming pregnant by her father, something right out of *Chinatown* ("my sister," *slap*, "my daughter"). Like John Huston in that film, her father is a monster—angry, bullying, hypocritical—but he isn't a recognizable monster. He doesn't take shape on the page as anything but a toxic blob. To obscure his identity, and perhaps to make him more universal, Harrison doesn't even furnish us with his first name, or make up a new one for him. (Did she call him "Dad" in bed?) There's never an offhand, clinching anecdote about their meals and trips together, or a realistic scrap of conversation. He speaks only in rhetoric. "Is it possible that you don't realize my devotion? You say I'm disrupting your studies, but don't you see you've wreaked havoc in my heart!"

Common to narratives of dysfunctional life is the revelatory moment of hitting bottom. After having sex on the office floor and in her grandmother's

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house, after having dropped out of college, fallen ill and pondered suicide, Harrison hits bottom when she and her father meet at a welfare hotel in Brooklyn where they have sex and he takes nude Polaroids. "I feel that in my own story I've at last arrived in the dirty place I belong," she says of this Tarantula Arms. After her grandfather dies, she kneels by his corpse in the morgue and kisses his cheek, a kiss that "begins to wake me, just as my father's in the airport put me to sleep." (What symmetry!) Sleeping Beauty finally snaps out of her coma when her mother dies of cancer, and she pays vigil by her corpse, caressing the dead body as an erotic object and realizing at last that "the spell is broken, her death has released me." No longer needing her father to get at her (defunct) mother, Harrison finally ends the affair, her father fading shabbily into the ether.

In the years that follow, Harrison will be able to achieve some perspective and get past the blight. She marries, has children.

> In our marriage we've made a place for my father and what happened between me and him. It's a locked place, the psychic equivalent of a high cupboard, nearly out of reach.
>
> My children touch my face, my hair. They kiss me. To them I am perfect and beautiful.

But one has to step back from this happily-ever-after tableau and ask: Is the publication of *The Kiss* a responsible act? Does it truly provide Harrison with "closure" and end the cycle of misery? Or might it perpetuate another round?

The rationale given for writing *The Kiss* is that the incestuous affair between Harrison and her father so clouded and dampened her psyche that only directly addressing the issue would do. Her agent told *The New York Observer* that she advised Harrison to put aside the family saga novel that she was writing and tackle this obstruction as nonfiction. "It was my feeling that ... she needed to exorcise what happened with her father. Not that it was blocking her, but it was preoccupying her." Having been granted permission to say the unsayable, Harrison could hardly rein the words in her head, writing *The Kiss* "in one of those strange periods of white heat." *The Kiss* reads more like dry ice than white heat, but never mind. The point is: just because she wrote it doesn't mean she had to publish it.

It is assumed today that all secrets are bad, that withholding them is unhealthy; secrets denied the clean light of day will only fester. Yet the celebrities and near-celebrities who write or dictate tell-all books seldom find themselves purged and at peace. Instead, like Roseanne and Patti Davis, they feel compelled to toss out more red meat in even gaudier sequels. The truth is that some secrets may have a healthy purpose, providing a buffer zone or guardrail against a careless and uncaring all-impinging world. Secrets are an integral part of privacy, a personal identifying mark or a family bond. "Deeply experienced people—this continually impresses me—will keep things to themselves," the narrator of Saul Bellow's novella *The Bellarosa Connection* remarks.

For a writer, secrets are more than material; they are intellectual capital that accrues power and interest by being nursed in solitude. (Bellow's narrator speaks of secrets being converted into burnable energy.) To fling them out too freely is to vulgarize them, and to risk injuring those most intimately involved. There is a big difference between getting something out of your system and putting it on the market. Harrison herself claims, "I was never trying to figure out what I was going to get from this book. Really, I just wanted to write it." Why not wait, then, and give the manuscript time to cool?

It's not as if she hasn't broached the subject before. As Michael Shnayerson damagingly documented, some of the big set pieces in *The Kiss* (an incident involving kittens, the gynecological deflowering) are reprised from Harrison's first novel, *Thicker than Water*. Shnayerson concluded that "this is not a case of a novelist taking some bit from her past that appears in one book and re-examining it in the next. This is a wholesale lift." And the scenes in which her father takes photographs of her on the road recall her second novel, *Exposure*, which also featured a hovering, seductive shutterbug. Tonally, *The Kiss* is the same as *Thicker than Water* and *Exposure*. Harrison isn't following the lead of Philip Roth and saying, in effect, "You've read the novels—now for the facts behind the fiction." *The Kiss* doesn't read as a tonic antidote or a frank revision. It reads as yet another costume jewelry display of rapt sensibility. Shnayerson speculated that the reason Harrison chose to publish is one of expediency: she wanted to make a killing, to cash in on her catharsis. "Literary fiction" has become a dread phrase in publishing, and the sales of Harrison's novels have only been so-so; but a juicy memoir is where the money is. It is certainly true that opportunism oozes from every pore of *The Kiss* and its launch.

But I think that Harrison's decision to publicize her past is animated by something more, and even worse, than the desire for a best-seller. It's an acting-out unconsciously intended to inflict discomfort closer to home. For Colin and Kathryn Harrison have two children, a son and a daughter. It is the daughter, Sarah, on whom she dotes in print. In articles for women's magazines, Harrison stresses how beautiful her daughter is. In *Vogue*, she recalled sitting with another mother and watching their daughters play. "They are only six, but already we know that mine will spurn and hers will suffer." Last summer Harrison wrote her most intimate article concerning her future heartbreaker of a daughter. It was called "Tick," and it appeared in *The New Yorker*.

In retrospect, "Tick" served as an ugly little appetizer for *The Kiss*. It concerned an incident at the Harrisons' summer house, when the daughter was 5. Harrison is brushing Sarah's hair. "I brush longer than I need to. The tangles are out and the brushing soothes me with its repetitive motion, like sewing or sweeping or fucking, late-night, too-tired-to-fuck fucking." When I originally read this passage, I was puzzled as to why Harrison had sexualized the prosaic act of brushing her daughter's hair, and disturbed by how she had sexualized it in language that suggested joyless, slugged grinding.

Now, in *The Kiss*, we read how Harrison would sit at the vanity table as her mother brushed her hair. Harrison's long blond hair was a source of great pride to her: "a symbol of *me*," "an obvious symbol of sexuality." Her hair is the first feature her father fawns over when he sees her after all those many years. When her mother falls ill, Harrison decides to have her Rapunzel locks chopped. "Within the haircut are, of course, love and anger: a hostile capitulation. I make my hair a sacrifice to my mother's vision of the daughter she wanted, a relic of the girl who lived to please her mother...." (Harrison scholars should note that she told the same anecdote in an article in *Vogue*, September 1994. No one can say she doesn't recycle.) Sarah's hair, her "beautiful braids," is a living talisman, a seductive snare. Just as Harrison displaced her mother in her father's bed, she is destined to be sexually upstaged in time by her own beautiful daughter.

The hard brushing that she gives her daughter's hair suggests the resentment that she feels; and this amorphous resentment sharpens into focus when Harrison discovers a tick in her daughter's hair. The tick is pale and engorged. Using tweezers to extract the tick by its

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head, Harrison, repulsed yet fascinated, doesn't dispose of the parasite in the toilet, as most people would do. She decides to torture it, searching for steak knives like some backyard barbecue Lady Macbeth, but settling for an odd implement that looks like a nut pick. With ruthless precision, she amputates the tick's legs, studying its defensive posture and marveling over its determination to live; then locates the steak knives and really goes to town, debating whether to aim "for that tiny anus or whatever that little hole is," or run the point of the blade straight through the sucker.

Harrison's reaction to the tick is so extravagantly fierce, fanatical and steel-edged that it's clear this is no average tick. This is a symbolic insect, like the cockroach in *The Kiss*. Residing in the nest of sexuality, the tick is the embodiment of lurking evil. Harrison's true mission surfaces when she confides that her real purpose in poking holes into the tick is to pop it open and release her daughter's blood. "The reappearance of my daughter's stolen life will qualify as redemption," she claims, fatuously. But whose redemption? Her daughter is bawling somewhere in the house; redemption isn't on her agenda. Stolen life? All the tick drew was blood.

No, it was Harrison's life which was stolen, by her abandoning parents. And in going after that bulb of blood that the tick has become, Harrison is out to break her daughter's hymen, as her mother broke hers. She's left frustrated as the tick refuses to cooperate. Only when she pulps the tick's body does she realize that "Sarah's blood has turned to excrement." The unspoken lesson of "Tick" is, eros ends in shit.

Not only did Harrison write about her daughter within such a graphic, mad-scientist scenario, she also denied her daughter the decency, the solace, of anonymity. Accompanying Harrison's article, *The New Yorker* published a photograph of Sarah Harrison on her mother's lap. She looks unhappy in the shot, squirming, pouty, perhaps about to cry. Surely such a gross invasion of the child's privacy wasn't necessary. Rereading "Tick" after reading *The Kiss*, however, I can't help but feel that these two productions constitute a narcissistic act on Harrison's part intended to invite misery and humiliation upon her children, especially the daughter, as misery was visited upon her. (Narcissistic, because Harrison craves the public spotlight as deeply as she did her father's heat-seeking eyes.)

Discussing the possible impact that *The Kiss* and its resultant publicity might have on her children, Harrison has resorted to weasel words. She told *The New York Observer* that "my life as a writer is quite separate from my life as a mother, and I know this is an issue I'm probably going to have to address with my children, and I'm waiting for my cue from them." *Probably* have to address? You mean, as if this were a storm that might blow out to sea?

Similarly, she told *Mirabella* that "I would like them to be as little aware of it [the incest] as possible.... I don't want it to be thrust on them when they're not ready." Well, publishing a book and giving interviews to *Mirabella* and the *Observer* isn't exactly a protective-bubble policy. If Harrison is so concerned about her children being "ready," why not wait and publish the book when they are older, and better able to absorb the news? Why, in short, would you tell the entire world something before you tell those whose happiness and well-being matter most? She is the one doing the thrusting. And she may not even be telling the truth now. In the *Mirabella* interview, Harrison admits that "I wanted my father, let's just say that. And I got him." It is a statement of intent and initiative completely at odds with the narration and the tenor of *The Kiss*, where she is a meek passive vessel adrift and her father the pirate who boards her. No seduction is ever truly one-sided. Harrison's remarks in *Mirabella* suggest that *The Kiss* may be another form of fiction.

In the days of Dick Morris, we should hardly be surprised to see content-providers sacrificing personal considerations to further their cockamamy careers. Colin Harrison, for his part, has written an article for *Vogue* on what it's like to be married to a woman who had incest with her father. Of course, when you have something intimate and painful to share, what better venue than *Vogue*? It didn't take much arm-twisting, a *Vogue* editor informed *Mediaweek*. "Colin was willing, and he wrote something that is quite beautiful and sturdy." Colin himself told *Mediaweek* that "this is the first piece of journalism I've written about her, ever. But it wasn't a hand-wringing situation by any means, because I'm extraordinarily proud of her. That's my overriding emotion in her: pride." The combined smarm of Colin and Kathryn Harrison is enough to drive one backwards. *The Kiss* will be soon forgotten, but the Harrisons have secured their place as the Sonny and Cher of dysfunction.

A final note. Among the luminaries bestowing a blurb on *The Kiss* is the psychologist and saint Robert Coles, author most recently of *The Moral Intelligence of Children*. The Harrisons don't know any better, but doesn't he?

JAMES WOLCOTT is a contributing editor to *Vanity Fair*.

Black Bread

BY RICHARD PIPES

A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution by Orlando Figes

(Viking, 923 pp., $39.95)

Future historians will likely view the Russian Revolution as the central event of the twentieth century. The Communist regime that emerged from it provided the model for the totalitarian states that came to power during the interwar period in Italy and Germany and, at the same time, supplied their leaders with an enemy with whom to frighten the people into surrendering their freedoms. Moscow's directives to German Communists in the early 1930s forbidding them to collaborate with the Social-Democrats helped pave Hitler's rise to power. Clandestine Soviet-German military collaboration between 1921 and 1933 facilitated German circumvention of the Versailles Treaty and prepared the Wehrmacht for the blitzkrieg. And, finally, the cold war that the Communist regime of the Soviet Union launched after World War II dominated world politics for most of the century's second half.

Like all events that have such momentous consequences, the Russian Revolution has been the subject of scholarly controversy. The dispute among historians centers on the question of whether its outbreak and its outcome were inevitable, since they were driven from

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"below" by irresistible social forces; or, on the contrary, whether its course was largely set by power-hungry politicians from the radical intelligentsia who exploited the spontaneous social upheaval to impose their own brand of despotism from "above." The former position, adopted from the beginning by the Communist Party and forced by it on Soviet scholars, was embraced in the 1960s by the younger generation of Western historians, the so-called "revisionists."

Orlando Figes's book is one of several indications that the pendulum is beginning to swing back toward the traditional position. In his introduction, Figes dismisses the "bottom-up approach so fashionable these days among the 'revisionist' historians of Soviet Russia." On most controversial issues he sides with the traditionalists, though not the whole way. He adopts the view that Lenin's regime was modeled on the "patrimonial" system prevalent in tsarist Russia, under which the rulers ran and owned the country. As the title of his book indicates, moreover, Figes perceives the revolution to have been a tragedy, not a progressive event. On the interpretation of the events of October 1917, a central issue in the historiographical dispute, Figes opts for the view that it was a coup d'état rather than a mass-movement, though he hedges this evaluation by adopting the revisionist thesis that it was unpremeditated. He similarly agrees with the traditionalists that General Kornilov did not intend to topple Kerensky, that it was Lenin who ordered the murder of Tsar Nicholas and his family, and that the Bolsheviks faced violent resistance from the peasantry. For Figes, the "masses" do play a crucial role—they are the chief protagonists of his book—but mainly as a barbarous, destructive force. They certainly are not portrayed as the class-conscious heroes of revisionist histories.

At the same time, Figes is careful not to alienate the revisionists, who are a force to be reckoned with, inasmuch as they dominate the academic discipline of modern Russian history in the United States and in Europe. To placate them, he extols their writings as "seminal," "magisterial" and "classic," compliments he never pays those of the opposing ("right") school. He also aligns himself with the left in downplaying the role of the intelligentsia. As a result, very much like Kerensky, whom he depicts as "straddling Right and Left," he is likely to please neither school.

A People's Tragedy is an eclectic work. It lacks an overarching point of view, largely because the author is more interested in pictures than ideas. Figes bases his descriptions of events on primary sources, but he interprets events—to the extent that he does so—by relying on secondary works. And so the strength of his book lies, not surprisingly, in description. Employing a cinematographic technique, Figes displays impressive skill in bringing to life events that appear in many other histories of the revolution, notably E. H. Carr's, as lifeless abstractions. He dexterously shifts the focus of his lens from wide-angle to near-distance and then zooms in to highlight individuals and minor yet characteristic episodes. What historian has ever seen fit to note that immediately after the night meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee on October 10, 1917, at which the decision was taken to topple the Provisional Government, the hostess served the future leaders of the Soviet Union a meal of cheese, salami and black bread? Or that two weeks later the ministers of the doomed government dined in the beleaguered Winter Palace on borscht, steamed fish and artichokes?

Figes's account of the February Revolution in Petrograd is riveting. The turmoil, the confusion, the fears and the exaltation of those days are all here. This style of narrative recalls John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook The World*, in which images overshadow concepts. There are powerful descriptions of the rural violence during the Civil War. No reader of *A People's Tragedy* will ever think of the Russian Revolution—of any revolution, for that matter—as a romantic adventure.

To make the story still more intelligible in human terms, Figes traces the experiences of several individuals, some notable, others unknown, by drawing on their private correspondence and memoirs. Among them are the liberal populist Prince G. Lvov, the first Prime Minister of Provisional Government; Maxim Gorky, the writer who had a love-hate relationship with Lenin and his regime; Alexei Brusilov, an outstanding tsarist general who in 1920 supported the Red Army against the Poles; and several obscure figures, including peasants. This technique gives flesh to a political and social narrative that otherwise might seem incomprehensible to modern readers.

Still, it is not without its drawbacks. By concentrating on what he considers the typical, Figes tends to neglect the decisive. In his account, effect displaces cause. Thus Paul Miliukov, the leader of the liberal party, in many respects Russia's most influential politician of the pre-revolutionary decade, is not given his due. The same applies to Alexander

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Guchkov, the head of the conservative Octobrists, and Victor Chernov, who led the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the political party with the largest following both before and during the revolution.

But an even more deleterious consequence of the stress on graphic description and visual imagery is the avoidance of analysis, which, after all, is the historian's main duty. In this book, the what almost completely eclipses the why. There is not enough probing into the minds of protagonists, and what probing there is tends to be superficial and unconvincing. Thus Figes provides no satisfactory explanation for why Nicholas clung, with such disastrous results, to autocratic power, even though it gave him no personal pleasure. The explanation lies in Nicholas's desire to honor the coronation oath that he had taken, and in his conviction that Russia's intellectuals, who were bound to take charge in a democracy, would bring nothing but ruin to the country. Figes stresses Lenin's lust for power, but he does not explain in any depth why Lenin chose to split the Social-Democrats and to create his own party committed to unleashing a social revolution from above. This stemmed from Lenin's realization that the working class had no stomach for revolution. And the reasons for Russia's entry into World War I, an event which Figes believes "ignited" 1917, are not adequately discussed.

This avoidance of analysis is especially glaring when it comes to explaining the causes of the revolution. In his seventeen-page conclusion, Figes devotes more space to the fate of Lvov and Gorky than to the reasons for this "People's Tragedy." He tells us—correctly, in my judgment—that "Bolshevism was a very Russian thing," and that the Bolshevik regime "was a mirror-image of the tsarist state." In his opinion, Bolshevism struck root because of the "backwardness of Russia's democratic culture." These observations are true, and they explain why the revolution evolved as it did; but they do not explain why it occurred in the first place.

In some respects, the book gets better as it proceeds, since Figes's own expertise lies in the period 1918-20, the subject of his earlier work, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*. The account of the downfall of tsarism and the establishment of the Bolshevik regime is entirely derivative, suffering from occasional errors. No convincing case is made for why Figes begins the story in 1891. That year did indeed witness a terrible famine; but it is wrong to argue, as Figes does, that it marked the onset of a fatal break between Russian society and its government. Radical ideas, especially Marxist ones, were confined at this time to tiny intellectual circles, mostly university students and dropouts. For the vast majority of Russians, the 1890s was a decade of phenomenal industrial growth and political quiescence.

Figes attempts to explain Kerensky's inaction in the face of the Bolshevik danger in the fall of 1917 by a "paralytic fear of the Left." But we know from Kerensky himself, as well as from his associates, that he was obsessed with the threat from the right. And Figes speaks of the Russian peasants' firm commitment to the Soviets, whereas in reality they ignored the Soviets, who were forced upon them by the Communists, preferring to follow their village assemblies. Russian peasants were "not tied to the land" after emancipation, as was proved by the fact that at the turn of the century they constituted the majority of the residents of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Alexander Kolchak, the head of the White Army in Siberia, identified as a "mining engineer," was in fact a naval officer specializing in minelaying. William Bullitt, a junior employee of the U.S. intelligence services in Paris, was no stranger to vanity, but he would have been amazed to learn that he was President Wilson's "principal foreign policy advisor."

The book, moreover, has no shortage of contradictions. On one page we are told (wrongly) that the serfs emancipated in 1861 could not own land individually, and a few pages later we are told (rightly) that during the last four decades of the nineteenth century 40 percent of the nobles' land was purchased by peasants. Some of it was acquired by the communes, but a good part of it passed into individual (household) ownership. In one place Figes has Tsar Nicholas II "dissolving" the Duma in September 1915, and in another place, two pages later, "proroguing" it. He identifies 71 percent of the top four ranks of the Russian bureaucracy as consisting of "noblemen," and nearly in the same breath he informs us that membership in the top four ranks carried hereditary nobility—which means that all members of the bureaucratic elite were nobles.

Figes has read widely. He quotes copiously but not always generously. In *A People's Tragedy* (*PT*, in what follows), especially the first part, which is the more derivative, I found him frequently giving proper credit to my own writings for factual information, but no less often drawing on my opinions in *The Russian Revolution* (*RR*) and *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (*RUBR*) without attribution. The following are some instances of this unwholesome practice:

- ... our story ends in 1924, with the death of Lenin, by which time ... the basic institutions, if not all the practices, of the Stalinist regime were in place. (*PT*, p. xv)

The book concludes with the death of Lenin in January 1924, by which time all the institutions and nearly all the practices of the future Stalinism were in place. (*RUBR*, p. xvii)

- No other country in the world had two kinds of police—one to protect the interests of the state, the other to protect its people. (*PT*, p. 124)

The Department of Police was unique to Russia: only Russia had two kinds of police, one to protect the interests of the state, the other to maintain law and order among the citizens. (*RR*, p. 74)

- The Law of Succession made it clear that the Russian throne was 'not the Emperor's private property nor his patrimony to be disposed of according to his will' ... (*PT*, p. 344)

'The Russian throne [was] not the emperor's private property nor his patrimony [*votchina*] to dispose of according to his own free will.' (*RR*, p. 314)

- This at last was mutiny: having been denounced as a rebel, Kornilov chose to rebel. (*PT*, p. 451)

This, at last, was mutiny.... Kornilov rebelled only after having been charged with rebelling. (*RR*, p. 460)

- Kerensky ... said: 'I will not give them the revolution'—as if it had been his to give. (*PT*, p. 451)

Kerensky said, 'I will not give them the Revolution'—as if it were his to give or keep. (*RR*, p. 457)

- The Cheka was a state within a state. (*PT*, p. 631)

The security police [was] virtually a state within the state. (*RR*, p. 829)

- ... it must never be forgotten that while many revolutionaries were Jews, relatively few Jews were revolutionaries. (*PT*, 82n)

It must never be forgotten that ... while not a few Communists were Jews, few Jews were Communists. (*RUBR*, p. 113)

I could cite many more examples. They raise the disturbing question of whether similar unattributed borrowings were not made from other sources.

An especially peculiar coincidence occurs in the introduction to *A People's Tragedy* and my own *The Russian Revolution*. I wrote: "This book is the first attempt in any language to present a comprehensive view of the Russian Revolution...." (*RR*, p. xxi). Figes apologizes for the length of his volume by claiming it to be "the first attempt at a comprehensive history of the entire revolutionary period in a single volume." His claim, however, is not really borne out. There are various omissions, the most glaring of which is the neglect of foreign policy.

The Bolsheviks never concealed that they regarded their power seizure of Russia as a prelude to world revolution, a fact

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of which Figes is not unaware. "As Marxists," he says of the Bolsheviks, "it was inconceivable to them that the socialist revolution could survive for long in a backward peasant country like Russia without the support of the proletariat in the advanced industrial countries of the West. Left to themselves ... the Bolsheviks believed they were doomed to fail." True enough. And yet all their efforts, from 1917 onward, to spread the revolution abroad are virtually omitted from the narrative.

Figes's dislike—or is it misunderstanding?—of the international aspects of the Bolshevik Revolution goes so far that he interprets Lenin's insistence on making peace with the Germans immediately on coming to power as a sign that he was giving up the idea "of the revolution spreading to the West" in order to concentrate on "the consolidation of Socialism in One Country." Nothing could be further from the truth. Lenin regarded the peace of Brest-Litovsk as the opening gambit of an international revolution: he believed that it would set off a general civil war that his regime would inflame and assist until socialism triumphed on a global scale. In September 1917, while hiding from Kerensky's police, in a desperate effort to convince his colleagues to overcome their hesitations and proceed with the coup, Lenin wrote them that "to obtain an armistice now means to *conquer the whole world.*" (The italics are Lenin's.) True, 150 pages later, in dealing with the aftermath of Russian defeat in Poland in 1920, apparently forgetting what he had written about the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, Figes has Lenin once again—this time correctly—giving up the "fantasy" of world revolution; but the reader has no way of knowing that the three years between Brest and the Polish debacle were a period of unremitting effort to subvert foreign states.

The Communist International or Comintern, the principal arm of the Communist Party in this subversive activity, is mentioned a mere three times in a volume of over 900 pages. The Communist uprisings in Hungary, Austria and Germany are either disposed of in a couple of sentences or ignored altogether. The treaty of Rapallo in 1922, an accord that laid the first stone of the August 1939 non-aggression treaty between Germany and Soviet Russia, and that they sprang on an unsuspecting world, is not even mentioned. Relations with the Ukraine, with Russia's Muslims and Caucasian nations, with newly independent Poland and Finland—which had a significant and perhaps decisive effect on the outcome of the Russian Civil War—are gone over ever so lightly. These are stunning omissions for an author who thinks it worthwhile to report what Lenin and Trotsky ate for dinner on October 10, 1917, and to cite at length the personal reactions to each stage of the revolutionary upheaval by a political non-entity such as Prince Lvov.

Blindness to the foreign aspects of the Russian Revolution leads Figes grotesquely to misinterpret Soviet policies in the summer of 1920, when the Red Army was advancing on Warsaw in what appeared to be an unstoppable steamroller but which ended in military debacle. In September 1920, addressing a secret meeting of the Communist Party, Lenin explained that the disastrous Polish adventure had been intended as a strategic assault on the capitalist West and the entire Versailles postwar settlement. He portrayed Germany and England as in the throes of revolutionary turmoil. Having defeated the White Armies, which Lenin represented as mere stooges of the Allies, the Politburo decided that the time had come to take on the principals. Here are Lenin's words, which were first made public in 1992:

> Our conviction ripened that the Entente's military offensive against us was over, that the defensive war with imperialism was over, and that we have won it.... We faced a new task. The defensive period of the war with worldwide imperialism was over and we could, and had the obligation to, exploit the military situation to launch an offensive war.

Respect

A latticework of trees at dusk, silhouettes
of sky shading upwards into the darkest blue.
I'm thinking of Frost stepping out of his cabin
to watch the snow falling, evening coming down.
I've seen the place, walked around the chair
he wrote in, felt a suitable respect.
I've seen the film his publishers made
where he wanders off to chop some wood
as if that was what he always did
before beginning a poem. When in fact ...
But why should we care about that?
So what if he was a terrible man. So what
if Philip Larkin hated everybody, and wrote
his friends to say how much
he hated his other friends, and finally
all the world except, perhaps, the Queen.
He knew how to keep it from his work.
I'd like to believe he found a place that mattered
among those words, but what do I know?
For him it may have mattered less and less.
What's to be done with all the rubbish
of a life when you know so little
can be made memorable? They got famous
and mean. They were rude at parties
and lost their friends, or couldn't be sure
if they had or not. They got old
and were afraid. Now I'm imagining
Frost opening the door to see
snow coming down fast into that field,
and thinking of nothing new to say.
But by then the world should look
the way you've written it.
So what if the world changes. So what
if you suspect, late at night when you can't
drink yourself any closer to sleep,
that all your bitterness adds up to nothing
but more bitterness, and those few books
are what you used to be.
So what if that's sad, and it is. So what
if there's no other way to end.

LAWRENCE RAAB

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One would think that this is clear enough. Yet Figes, for reasons known only to himself, chooses to interpret these words in his own way: "[Lenin's speech] suggests that the offensive against Warsaw was not supposed to be the start of an invasion of the West ... but on the contrary a deterrent to the West against invading Russia." Lenin, in other words, thought defensively—a reading that contradicts Lenin's explicit words and makes no sense in any event, since in 1920 no foreign power had the slightest intention of undertaking military action against Soviet Russia.

Indeed, only two months earlier, in July 1920, Lenin sent Stalin a coded telegram, ignored by Figes, in which he spoke of the need to "sovietize" Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Italy—hardly "deterrent" moves. What Lenin had in mind in all these cases, Germany and England included, was not a frontal military assault on the foreign nations' armed forces, an "invasion" in the conventional sense of the word; he desired instead a civil war instigated by indigenous Communists, on whose behalf the Red Army would intervene—exactly as it would do in Georgia a few months later. This is why Lenin at one point interrupted his speech to admonish the stenographers to "take fewer notes. This should not get into the press." Had Lenin's remarks really been defensive, Soviet archivists would have had no reason to keep its stenographic transcript under lock and key for seventy years.

I do not wish to be harsh on Orlando Figes. He is a gifted historian capable of significant work. He is not tempted by fashionable theories. He is bold and imaginative. The sins of his book are the sins of youth. He attempted too much too early, failing to think things through and borrowing ideas from too many sources at once. His formidable descriptive gifts and his eye for colorful detail do not compensate for an inadequate grasp of the full picture and for insufficiently developed analytic skills.

RICHARD PIPES is Baird Professor of History Emeritus, Harvard University, and author most recently of *The Unknown Lenin* (Yale University Press).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 5*

to William Hazlitt, Matthew Arnold, George Bernard Shaw, H.L. Mencken, F.R. Leavis, George Orwell, Lionel Trilling, Edmund Wilson, Philip Rahv, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, Cynthia Ozick and many, many others who approach literature with strong moral and ethical preoccupations. Reading literature in this way is part of the mainstream of criticism and is not some eccentric error committed solely by pretentious philistines at Columbia. Indeed, what the common reader and some of the greatest critics want from literature—sensuous pleasure, range and depth of experience, moral and formal complexity, some intimation of how to live as well as how to read—may not be all that different.

Vendler, of course, also speaks on behalf of a long-established critical position: the New Criticism, which flourished in the '40s and '50s. A distinguished critic of poetry, she reads for structure, metaphor and voice, applying her own taste and temperament to a conception of poetry as a self-enclosed artifice of delight—an expression of "soul" as opposed to a publicly determined self. It is a method perfectly suited to reading poetry in English, particularly lyric poetry in English.

The Literature Humanities course, however, is not a graduate seminar in Emily Dickinson or Wallace Stevens; it is an introduction, for beginning students, to epic poetry, tragic and comic drama, philosophical dialogue, the essay and the novel, and it is possible that Vendler's version of criticism would not perform very well when confronted with these works, many of them sprawling and monstrously ambitious (and read largely in translation). She complains about the "solemnity" of Columbia's list (Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Virgil, the Bible, Augustine, Dante, Cervantes, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Descartes, Austen, Woolf and so on). Does she dislike it so much because her own method of reading could not accommodate the books? Perhaps the method, not the list, is the problem. As for myself, I would be alarmed by the virtuosity of a critical system that addressed *Oedipus Rex*, *King Lear* or *Pride and Prejudice* without ever coming around to moral and ethical sentiment.

Like all strong teachers and critics, Helen Vendler insists on her own way of reading, but she does it with a contemptuous rudeness toward others, as if intelligence itself were defined by a single set of intellectual habits. Pressing her case, she offers the proudly puritanical view that it is "irrelevant" whether *Heart of Darkness* is pro- or anti-colonial (an issue addressed in my chapter on Conrad). After all, a work of narrative art is produced by "complex psychological and formal motives" that cannot be brought to the bar of justice. By attempting to clear *Heart of Darkness* of the charge of promoting colonialism and racism, I have failed, Vendler asserts, to see the "reality of [my] position, that the politically incorrect does not differ from the politically correct: both are moral positions with respect to art."

Surely this is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the New Criticism—folly maintained against all common sense. Among actual readers, Conrad's attitudes toward colonialism are one of the many significant things in *Heart of Darkness*. They matter, in part, because Conrad's formal inventions are inseparable from a highly developed moral consciousness; and his attitudes toward the Belgians, the British, the Africans and the entire colonial experience must be evaluated as elements in the tale's organization and effect. Vendler might like to rule out of existence whatever she cannot analyze purely as language. But Conrad's devastating portrait of the white "pilgrims" in the Congo has become part of the moral history of the West, an element in the West's self-recognition. Are we to ignore all that? George Orwell, Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling discussed Kipling's imperialism as a necessary element in their evaluation of his greatness as an artist. Were they, too, unable to read properly? In her unmodulated disapproval of reading for moral and ethical sentiment, Helen Vendler pretends that she speaks for literature itself when the truth is she speaks only for a narrow academic practice that has been rejected, rightly or wrongly, by most of her profession.

A course like Literature Humanities may have suffered, in the beginning, from an inherent tendency to genteelism. But after World War II, as Morris Dickstein has pointed out, the experience of totalitarianism, reinforcing the bitter insights of modernism, changed the way the books of the course were read. Teachers began to insist on the darker side of pre-modernist works, the discordancies, the unresolvable contradictions. A great teacher like Edward Tayler (whose work I document copiously though Vendler does no more than mention him in passing) studies the structure of the *Iliad* as a work of art. But, in the end, Tayler's structural analysis yields certain "moral" conclusions about the *Iliad* as a poem at odds with itself, split between the warrior code and Achilles's strange and powerful rejection of it in Book IX. And in Tayler's account, the *Odyssey*, whatever else it does, offers freshmen the difficult choice between being "Kalypsoed" (cloaked, hidden) or "Odysseused" (born for trouble). And so on. In brief, no one is serving these freshmen little lessons to help them easily master the world. The ethical and moral sentiment I heard (when I heard it) was implacably tough-minded.

There are, of course, better and worse readings, but there can be no single way to read these books; that is one reason they have survived for so long. Vendler is embarrassed and enraged when I

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report naïve student comments about Dante, even though the comments are highly interesting as an index to the intellectual and moral assumptions of young Americans. She is enraged that I offered a personal response to Virgil's *Aeneid*—that I noticed that the second half of the poem shows significant artistic weakness. Alas, genuine readers, particularly at the age of 48, are given to such dismaying outbreaks of judgment. After finishing my book, I discovered that what everyone remembers of the *Aeneid* is Book II (the fall of Troy) and Book IV (Dido and Aeneas); that there is a falling off in the second half turns out to be a common opinion. But, even if it were not, did I cast myself into outer darkness by saying what I thought? Does this woman want to control everyone's responses to everything? Vendler is at her most absurdly authoritarian when lecturing me on the permanence of the classics in a review of the book that argues for ... the permanence of the classics. It is subservience, not permanence, that non-professional readers object to.

I wrote for people who have complicated lives and who desperately grab at an hour or two to read seriously. Such people are hungry, and their hunger often makes them reach for the "meaning" of literature in ways that Vendler would find gauche. If they are lucky, they will read criticism that deepens or corrects their responses. If not, they may run afoul of contempt like Vendler's and suffer sufficient mortification to give up reading seriously altogether. Increasingly, of course, that is the way reading in America has gone; millions of bright people associate literature not with pleasure but with the classroom. Columbia, in its way, tries to fight the depressing American split between art and entertainment.

Columbia, Vendler says, "obviously selects literary works on the basis of their suitability for ethical or political argument." This is false. Columbia selects the works for imaginative power and influence and because they may—they just may—produce in their student readers lifelong habits of self-criticism. The college hopes to create a passion for literature strong enough to withstand both the tidal pull of specialized reading and the commonplace American conception of reading as a mere leisure pursuit. To do this, one must lead the students over the ridge of difficulty; one must induce them to attach pleasure to their developing sense of self. Who are you? What do you live for? What are you willing to die for? Studying the poems, plays and novels as complexly organized works of art doesn't make these questions disappear, nor should it.

As far as I am concerned, Columbia's core curriculum (and my book) is about pleasure and the making of souls, and the necessary relation between the two. Vendler is annoyed by my bringing things back to myself. But I wrote about my own life because I could best study in myself the play of enjoyment, self-knowledge and self-ignorance set off by reading this representative set of classics. At the same time, as I came into focus, I could also see in the students the beginning of eagerness for difficult things, a stammering beauty in their speech. Without that pleasure, there is no serious inner life—certainly no serious reading life. Vendler can insist as much as she likes that literature has never improved anyone's character, but teachers who cannot hold out the possibility of soul-making to freshmen are teachers irrecoverably diminished by professionalism.

Helen Vendler is so enmeshed in academic life that she seems to have forgotten that these books (with a few exceptions) were not written to be read in courses. They were read in the precursors of the modern university, in monasteries and academies, but also in private libraries, in the garden behind the house, on ocean voyages and on the reader's deathbed; and often in higgledy-piggledy order, out of context, in fragments, in poor translations and corrupt editions. When "the classics" were read in that haphazard way, they lived at the center of culture; now that they are controlled by professors and read properly, they are marginal to culture. Professor Vendler detests my amateurism. But what she marshals against it is not some larger vision of the role literature might play in our lives, but only the habits of her classroom. Looking about her, Helen Vendler might have asked whether those orthodoxies have been so obvious a success that they obliterate the claims of the general reader. On this occasion, the great critic of poetry has revealed herself a great prig.

DAVID DENBY
New York, New York

Helen Vendler replies:

David Denby persists in a set of distressingly simple (and false) oppositions: "trained professionals" versus "the common reader"; "pleasure" versus "the classroom"; "a passion for literature" versus "specialized reading"; "reading for moral and ethical sentiment" versus "a narrow academic practice"; "a personal response" versus "the New Criticism"; and so on. He indulges in a set of ad feminam epithets: I am twice said to be "enraged," represented as "a prig" engaged in "rapping her knuckles on the lecture podium." Stereotypes die hard. But isn't it proper to be "enraged" when someone lacking Latin pronounces on "significant artistic weakness" in the *Aeneid*?

Let me invoke, to defend the difference between "ideas" and a work of art, two writers, each of whom is far from being a prig, a specialist, an academic or a New Critic: Walt Whitman and John Ashbery. After paraphrasing the theme of "Chanting the Square Deific" to his friend Horace Traubel, Whitman added, "This is not the poem but the idea back of the poem or below the poem." (His remark, though made about a poem, is equally true of a novel or play.) One must read (or teach) the artwork itself, not "the idea back of ... or below" the artwork. John Ashbery, in a comparable way, calls the surface of a poem its "visible core." The idea that one can reach the core—including the core of "moral and ethical sentiment"—by any route other than that of the visible surface is always and everywhere mistaken. All writers know this.

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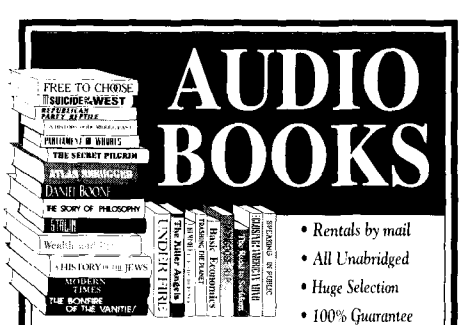

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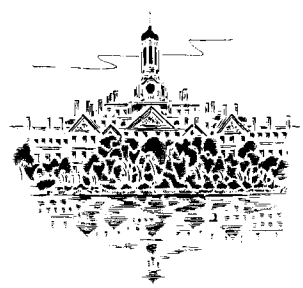
CAMBRIDGE DIARIST

Easy call

YOU CAN DEPEND ON GEORGE WILL to provide the truly learned historical analogies. The one he has so carefully chosen for Al Gore's explanations of his White House phone calls to Democratic contributors: Nuremberg. Spare us. This is but an instance of the hyperbole—no, the hysteria—which has overtaken the opining class, suddenly filled with legal scholars. My friend Charles Krauthammer, for example, accuses Gore (whom he calls, in the most tired of neologisms, "Mr. Clean") of "taking refuge in one of the flimsiest legal confections of our time" when the vice president says that soliciting a donation over the phone is legally different from soliciting one in person in the executive mansion. If Gore's defense seems legalistic it is only because the charges against him are trivial. Of course, both Krauthammer and Will would concede that, were Gore to ask for money across Lafayette Park at the Hay-Adams Hotel, he'd be violating no law. So it is not the solicitation of funds per se that appalls them. After all, if such transactions appalled them they'd have to be appalled at their right-wing friends, which they clearly are not. But Krauthammer is worried about the "line between public service and self-serving campaigning." And, thus, he goes on: "It is precisely because the line drawn is necessarily somewhat arbitrary that it is very bright and very clear."

ACTUALLY, IT ISN'T AS BRIGHT OR clear as Krauthammer thinks. And, to the extent that it is bright or clear, the line cuts sharply against his argument. Writing for a unanimous Supreme Court in 1908 in *U.S.* v. *Thayer*, a case in which the defendant had mailed a request for a campaign contribution to a postal worker in a federal building, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. concluded that "the solicitation was in the place where the letter was received." Holmes emphasized that the law prohibited political solicitations "in any room or building occupied in the discharge of official duties," and "until after the letter had entered the building the offense was not complete." By that precedent, which is the most relevant one there is, a solicitation over the phone, even one initiated in the White House, is only illegal if its recipient answers the phone in a government building, which none of the recipients of Gore's calls did. This may not be a morally elevating answer to what Gore did, and he knows that. Legality is not the same as propriety, and it is not unreasonable to ask, as Gore must be asking himself, whether the vice president of the United States should personally dun donors. But the fact remains that Gore did not violate the law, neither its spirit nor a most exacting reading of its letter.

HE DID NOT VIOLATE ITS SPIRIT because the law, both in its initial 1883 expression as the Pendleton Act and in its 1979 update, was meant not to prohibit federal officials from asking private citizens for financial support but to prohibit them from strong-arming federally employed underlings into forking over money to the governing party. And nobody has ever accused Gore (or, for that matter, Bill Clinton) of doing that. Why, then, would Gore's accusers become apoplectic over these phone calls when these same people are utterly unmoved by the larger, and true, scandal of which this is a minor expression: a campaign financing process that puts our politics and our elected officials supinely hostage to the big rich? The fact is that, for some, this episode is just an opportune battle in the ongoing partisan wars. Given the other weighty scandals tormenting the Clinton administration, any misstep by Gore, however insignificant and unintended, was bound to be magnified and linked by the press, if not the public, to a wider tawdriness.



AFTER WATERGATE, LEGISLATION limited personal contributions to $1,000 per campaign. The logic behind the reform was that candidates themselves would not or could not bother to spend their own time on such small rewards. But the Federal Election Commission and the Supreme Court, in a series of related rulings, loosened the restrictions on political giving; and, poof, we had unrestricted soft money—not to the candidates (for which some limits were retained) but to the parties themselves. And these were protected by the First Amendment, no less. Contributors weren't about to give $100,000 or more to mere staff, and so the two parties became ever more inventive in inducing donors to give ever larger sums. Some enticements from the Republican leadership virtually promised giftgivers a hand in making law. And, then, there were the now famous and tacky Clinton innovations, some of which, I am afraid, go far beyond tacky. Still, if you total 1996 contributions to the candidates for president, Senate, House and to the two national committees, the GOP raised $553 million while the Democrats collected only $332 million.

NOBODY LIKES TO ASK OTHER PEOple for money, not even the Republicans who are so good at it, not even our blithe president. As for Gore, I know for a fact that he positively hates doing it. In any case, while both a congressman and a senator, he proposed various pieces to publicly finance federal elections. One such bill provided that incumbents receive only 95 percent of what challengers could get. Another required broadcasters to provide free time for election debates. None of these went anywhere. He is squarely on the record, however, as trying to change the system in which he has been obliged to participate. He is for this because he has always known the system is intrinsically corrupting, or at least contingently corrupting.

MANY OF THE COUNTRY'S EDITORIalists pretend that seekers of high public office can simply opt out of the search for money. Maybe they imagine that their own endorsements will persuade the citizen rich to provide the funds politicians need to run their campaigns. Finally, though, campaign finance reform is once again in the air and on the Hill. We will now see just how many senators and congressmen—and especially how many of the shocked and outraged Republicans—are ready for a serious effort to free the election process at last and at least from its utter dependence on big money.

AS FOR AL GORE, HE DOES NOT CUT corners, ethically or intellectually. Now, because he did what was expected of him by a president hungry for cash at whatever cost, he finds himself, in the depiction of a scandal-hungry press, cutting a Clintonian figure. This is exasperating to folks like myself who have known him for years. Gore is not Clinton. Some people don't like his environmental politics, and some don't like the way he carries himself (he is a sober man in a silly time). But before he made those phone calls for his boss no one ever thought to question his character. And, I believe, when the present national delirium is over, that's how it will be again.

MARTIN PERETZ

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Graham Nickson

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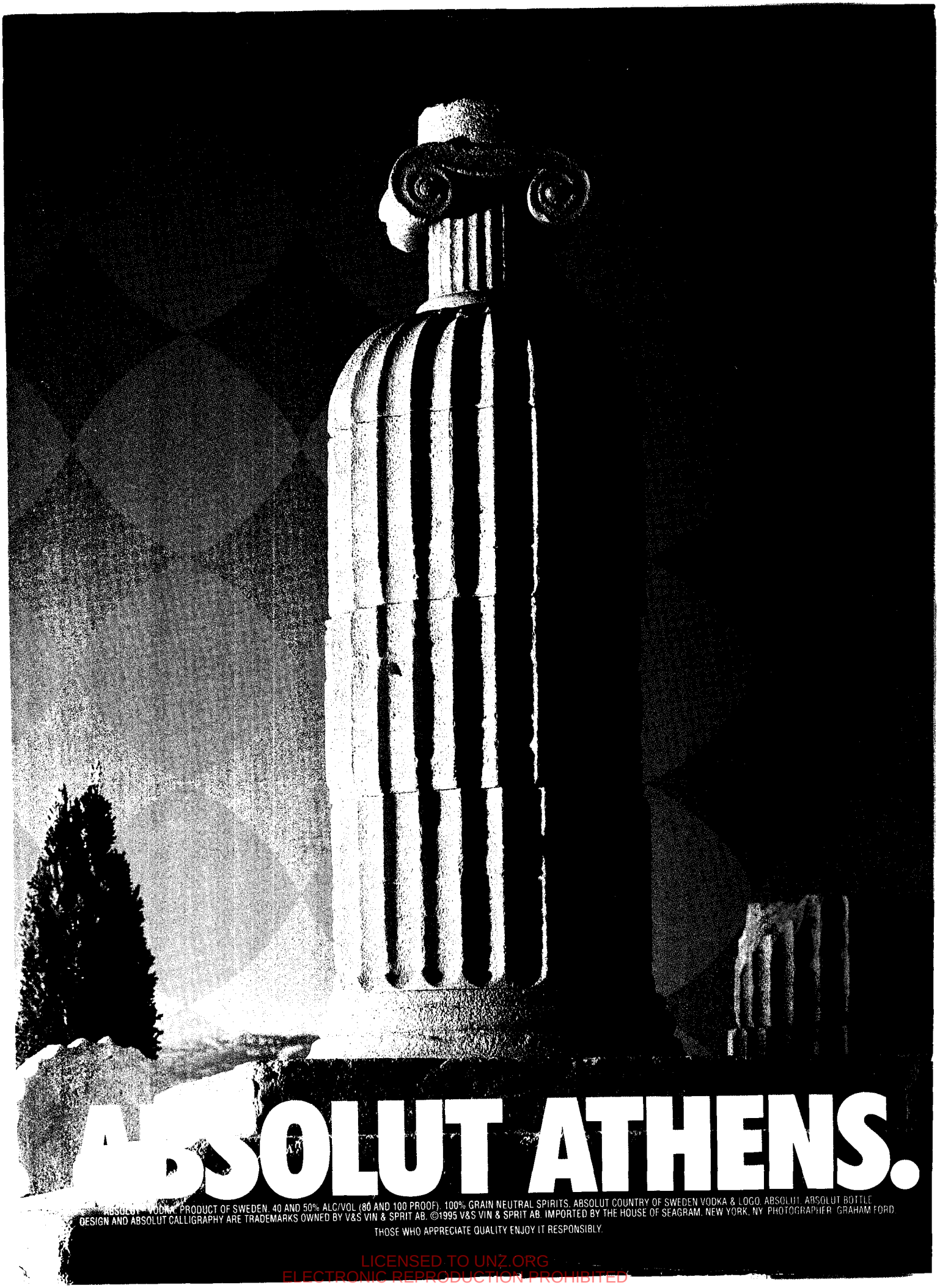

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